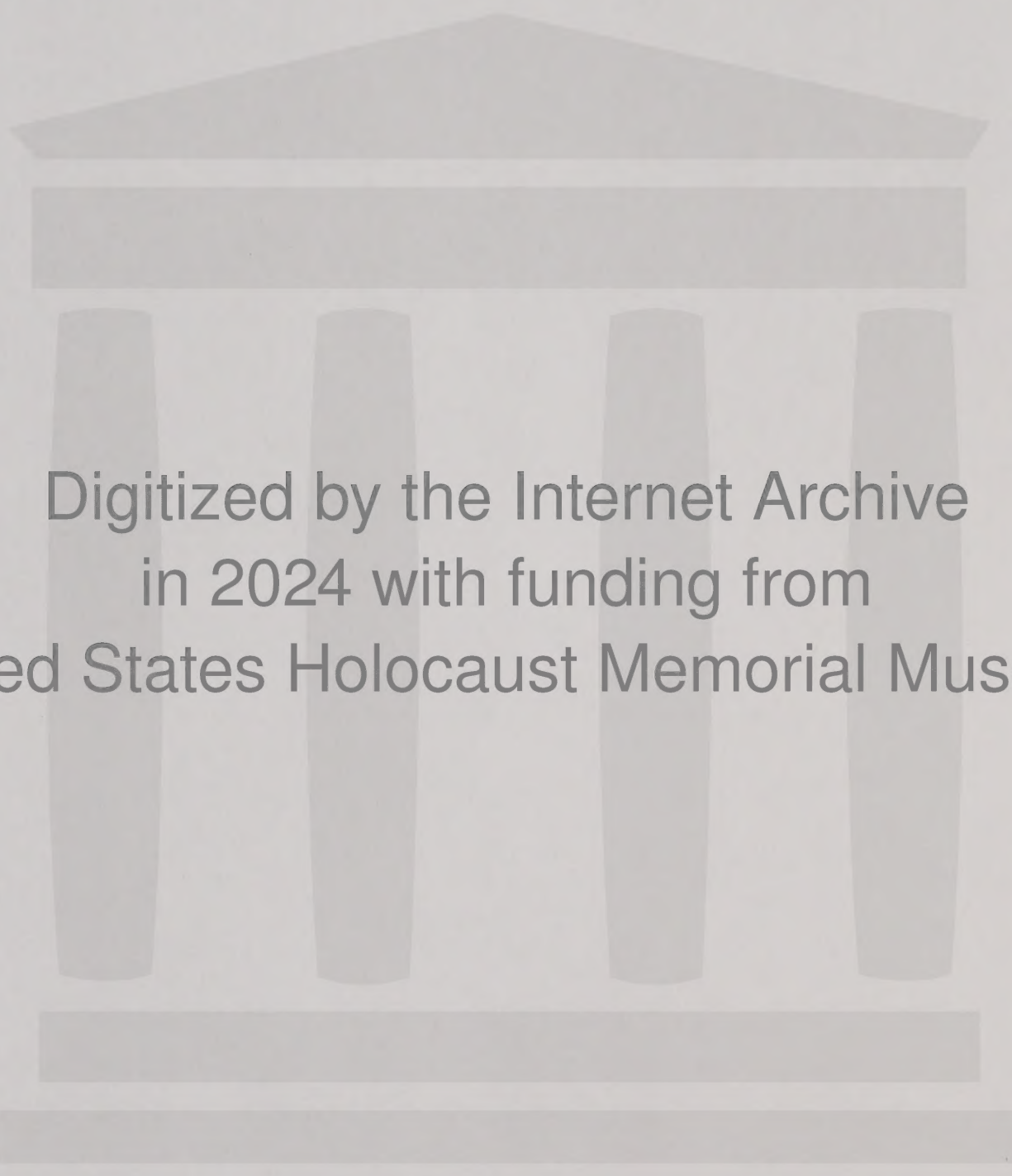




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# ZACHOR MANUSCRIPT

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# Zachor

## Chapter 1

### Happy Are They Who Dwell In Thy House

*"Ashre Ha am, Ashre Ha am,"* happy are they who dwell in Thy house... The magnetic power of the ancient words reached me as I stood way back in the balcony thousands of miles from my home in Canada. My soul drank in the searing chant delivered to a pitch by the fervor and sheer beauty of the cantor's voice. How strange to be moved spiritually and to such heights in this setting. The Sabbaths of my childhood were not sanctified in this erstwhile church-like atmosphere with heavy German overtones. We children of the small orthodox synagogue to which the *Ost Juden*, Eastern European Jews, belonged would tell each other in hushed tones that there was an organ in that large one. And now 59 years later in June of 1998 I was back in Stuttgart, the city of my birth and in that large sanctuary. Now devoid of organ music the warmth of the religious service mesmerized me.

As I sat pondering I overheard an exchange between two women in the pew in front of me: "He lives in New York but he is from Morocco. He is here in honor of our guests." He certainly was honoring me with his exquisite Sephardic rendition of the liturgy. Yet, did I not hear Ashkanasi melodious tones among the more chant-like Middle Eastern sounds? Must be that New York influence.

Then I remembered that just yesterday I had seen his picture next to Jesse Norman's on a billboard in the castle of Ludwigsburg. She was to sing that night and the cantor was to appear tomorrow in the castle's annual performing-arts festival. I shook my head in wonder. A cantor





gives a concert in Germany and at a castle at that! My childhood memory of posters was Jews depicted with long, hooked noses, Shylock greedy grins and the hunch back of Notre Dame deformed bodies. Now, here were a Jew and a black artist to appear, in what I later learned were sold out concerts that received rave reviews.

Was it only five days since I had arrived in Germany, the country from which I had fled for my life and where so many of my family perished? A land gone mad which had followed *evil-incarnate* disguised as the Pied Piper. Not the sweet sound of the flute but a demonic barking addressed the greed and hatred hidden in the very cells of his disciples. Declarations of superiority and promises of ultimate power for the master race evoked blind devotion from his subjects. And so they robbed, maimed, and killed us Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and all other they declared as subhuman. Oh tormented victims! In my heart you have become one people, the nation of my soul.

As I listened to the rich Sabbath prayers my mind wandered back several months when the invitation from the mayor of the city of Stuttgart had first arrived. Nineteen ninety-eight was the year when those born in twenty-six and still living were invited to come to the city of their birth with a companion for a paid two week stay.

At first I declined. The thought of listening to official apologies and letting the perpetrators wine and dine me was an insult to those who suffered more than I did and especially to the memory of the ones who did not live. Before my trip every German still represented the enemy. Then one night in a dream I heard myself called: "Be our witness, you who escaped. Go and honor us. Pray at our graves. *Zachor*, remember, and pay tribute on the very soil where we perished. Put a face to your childhood. You who has emotional amnesia, be strong and do your duty." I yielded to my





inner voice despite my fear. Would I be able to hold my emotions in check? Would my hostility spill over randomly?

No sooner did I get on the plane, a Lufthansa at that, than I was confronted with the tainted and indiscriminate image I had of Germans. The young, blond, blue eyed stewardess must have had a fight with her husband or some other incident had blackened her mood. Her movements were sharp and her voice harsh. A studied professional smile tried to hide an aggressive personality. My friend Miriam who was my traveling companion also felt the *Freulein* to be cold like the Arctic although Miriam is Canadian and not even Jewish. Hearing the other passengers around me speaking German or gutturally accented English made me cringe. I was really not interested in hearing the praises of *Hofbrau Beer* over Canadian Molson. Nor did I care how quickly they climbed Mount Whistler because they were *schtrong* Germans. How could they be pleasure-oriented while I was making the journey into the hell of my past? The hell to which their countrymen and possibly they themselves had subscribed. Resentment rose into bitterness. Then I remembered them, my kin of the heart. See what elitism, stereotyping and hatred had done to them, I told myself. I must not be sucked dry-- energy spent-- by rampant emotions, by being like the oppressor if only in thought. I looked at Miriam, the non-judgmental archetype of a friend, smiling at me. I sensed that she was aware of the turmoil within me. Her quiet presence gave me the tool to crack my armor. I made a conscious effort to take charge of my feelings. This affront to my preconceived notions was the beginning of a great change in the way I experienced the trip and afforded me an unexpected clarity.

*Georg von Pentz* of the *Kulturamt*, Cultural office, who was in charge of our program and was a major player in my ensuing change, met us at the airport. By then I had dropped some of my prickly sarcasm, but certainly not my enthusiasm and strong sense of what is right or wrong.





The first evening the Stuttgart Jewish community welcomed us at their center at 36 *Hospitalstrasse* that also housed the large rebuilt original liberal synagogue. I spoke to several of the 20 returnees. Along with our travel companions we were a group of 45. Here and there was a flicker of recognition. There was Edgar Kulb who knew my family well. He clearly remembered my siblings and me. Edgar had a photographic memory of his childhood in Stuttgart. Yet he could not remember what he had for breakfast that day. His mind as well as his body did not weather the passing of time as well as did most of us who had come on this trip. He reminded me that the synagogue building had housed a school. I began to recall. Yes, I had gone there from second grade on until I left Germany. Prior to that I had gone to the *Jakobschule*, the public school. There I attended Kindergarten and first grade. After that I was expelled for *my sin*. You see, I was Jewish. By then Jewish children were cast out lest they contaminate the pure Aryan flesh! My first grade teacher, an older woman, had been very sad.

The evening was a haze through which I wandered looking for landmarks. Such a wonderful large congregation of Russian immigrants, Polish survivors and post war German-born members! But there was no Rabbiner Bamberger. The present rabbi, Joel Berger of Hungarian background, was such a different religious leader, such a different man. Rabbi Bamberger, a deeply spiritual man, had insisted on discipline too but not at the expense of warmth and a sense of belonging. And, how I ached for the voice of our beloved Ashkanasi cantor, *Chasan Zanger* whose *niggun*s *still* sing in my head and heart. I was glad to return to our hotel that was next door. The tremendous generosity of the City of Stuttgart showed itself from the very beginning. Miriam and I each had a private room with bath where we happily dropped our travel weary bodies and tried to integrate our turbulent impressions, each under our respective feather downs in our individual rooms.





Our second day was lighter. After a tour of the city we were treated to *Kaffeetafel* at the *Schloss Solitude*. The light from the gleaming crystal chandeliers danced on the shining parquet floor, while the gold trimmed walls reflected their own luster and the velvet drapes added to an overall feeling of richness. The *Kaffeetafel* at the luxurious castle is akin to the elegance and splendor of high tea at Buckingham. We gorged ourselves with moist *Kugelhopf*, mountains of whipped cream cakes, and fruit-tarts, *Sachertorte* and strawberries dipped in thick, rich chocolate.

The next afternoon saw us with representatives of the Jewish community and city officials on the steps of the *Rathaus*. We were at city hall by invitation of *Oberbuergermeister, Mayor W. Schuster*. The newspaper photographers were busy snapping the group. I am not comfortable with so much pomp and ceremony and hid myself as best as I could from photographers and interviewers. As a result one of the pictures barely showed the side of my face, while another showed only the top of my head. Once inside the city hall chambers Mayor Schuster warmly welcomed us. He expressed what by now had become the theme of our hosts. *We are so sorry that you were forced out of your home. We cannot ask you to forgive what has been done to you. But please let us show our good will. Thank you for coming. I know that it was very hard for you to do so.* Rabbi Berger followed with his talk. It was nectar to my soul to see and hear a rabbi in a German city hall. But it was a shock and one from which I have not recovered, to hear Rabbi Berger refer to Germany as your *Vaterland* when he addressed us. Equally great was the shock that several of my fellow Jewish returnees were in full accord. Their German nationalism as fervent as before they were kicked out and their family and friends killed by the *Nazi Vaterland*. I later learned that *Landesrabbiner* Berger who served state-wide and while chosen by the Jewish community, is actually an employee of the state of *Baaden Wurthenberg*. I would hate to think that it was because of this that he presented us with, *your Vaterland*. What an ill chosen, if not downright bizarre concept, especially for an orthodox rabbi. While I remember that the rabbi's





speech actually had good points this remark overshadowed all else and I forgot the rest of what he said.

The *Kaffee und Kuchen* that followed in the *Rathskeller* consisted of a strawberry *Torte* and coffee with a heavy, rich aroma. Even better than the traditional afternoon snack was meeting so many interesting people. Especially Petra Voit, the Kindergarten teacher of the synagogue. She is a Christian. She speaks quite a bit of Hebrew and teaches the Jewish children all about their holidays. It seems that there is no conversion in Germany and one has to go to Israel according to Petra. She was to be very helpful to Miriam and me and bring us much joy throughout our stay. It is hard to describe what I felt when I returned to my room on Friday exhausted and found two small *Challahs*, (Sabbath bread) baked by Petra and her class, with a hand-painted card wishing me *Shabbat Shalom*.



## Chapter 2

### Kaddish

Early Thursday morning we piled into, what by now we referred to as, *our* bus. What was to follow dispelled any misgivings I had about coming on this trip. We visited the Jewish cemeteries of Stuttgart. The first was the older one. We walked around in solemn silence, each one lost in thoughts. We then went to the *Prag Friedhof*. I began to search through the cemetery, as did the other returnees. We were like orphaned children rushing to and fro reading the names on headstones: Kahn, Strauss, Levy and dates ranging over hundreds of years. Look here is my great-grandfather's and there is my aunt buried. Over there is Opa's grave? I walked on with Miriam. We took photo close ups of various headstones. Some of the inscriptions were in Hebrew and German. Often there was a line from a psalm or a quote from a prophet. I saw an inscription that gave Auschwitz as the place of death. What did the grieving surviving relatives do? Did they bring a handful of Jewish ashes from the hellhole and bury it here? Or did they put up the stone over an empty grave in the hopes that the ritual would bring some kind of closure? I shuddered at the thought of their anguish.

I walked to the last lane. Here the graves had more space between them than in the middle of the cemetery. Trees and shrubs bordered the headstones. Then I saw it. Oma's grave was amid full, green foliage. The Hebrew lettering was almost primitive. The stone was roughly cut and relatively small. The head stone had little in common with the craftsman-sculptured, polished stones and finely chiseled inscriptions of pre Nazi regime graves. Following the Hebrew, which I could not fully decipher, was her name in Latin letters: *Esther Tanne, 1869 - 1940*. My grandmother had died of diabetes worsened by her forced expulsion to Poland in October 1938. She and grandfather were dumped in a small stretch of land between Poland and Germany that did not officially belong to either. Poland did not want the Jews any more than did the Germans. I do not





know where they spent the next eight months. Possibly in Red Cross barracks or with Jewish Polish families after being permitted to be moved further in-land. Nor do I know why and how they returned to Germany. I had fled Germany just prior to their return and was never to see them again. War started two months hence. As I stood by the grave it seemed I could see my mother holding grandma in her arms as she breathed her last *Schema Israel*. Rest well *Omalein*. With all that you suffered in the *pogroms* in Poland and under Hitler you mercifully were spared witnessing the barbaric murders of your husband, daughter Friedel, your son in law Morris and their two babies. I am sorry that you never knew just as grandpa did not, that my Mutti, your eldest child made it safely to New York to join her children and husband. But she did not live long. Her anguish was too great and her memories too much to bear. She had not wanted to leave her father when a chance to flee through Portugal presented itself. It was 1941. He the saintly man commanded her: "Leave me to my fate. You must attempt the escape and try to reach your husband and children even if you die on the way."

The orthodox obedient daughter did as she was bid. He remained alone in the cold attic room to which he was condemned. She remained frozen in her guilt and sorrow for leaving him.

The house where grandpa was under house arrest had belonged to my father before it was confiscated. Now he was confined to the austere, lonely cabin size room. Oma and Opa had had a large apartment in our *Olgastrasse* house. My mother's four siblings had lived there until their respective marriages. Three of them managed to flee with their families. All ended up in Palestine. *Tante Friedel*, the youngest, her husband and children were already in camp by the time mother left.

Mother arrived in New York shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor 1941 after a harrowing trip. The boat, I believe it was a Portuguese freighter, was built to carry half the passengers that it



did on this clandestine journey. The old tub had not only to protect its illegal cargo but also outrun submarines and other weapon-armed predators. The trip was long as the ship was forced to take a round about route.

Mother literally kissed the ground when she set foot on U.S. soil. May be her gratitude came from having reached safety and there with her father's wish for her was full-filled. Yet her grief never lifted. She took ill a few years later. The doctors said that it was cancer. I know better. Her real disease was a broken heart.

Miriam took pictures of the grave and walked behind me. Her feet so gently treading that I could not hear but only feel her calming presence. A few yards further along the lane I stopped in front of a similar somewhat crudely carved stone. As I read the names, Felix David 1909-1938, Ruth David 1911-1938, Benyamin David 1936- 1938, Gideon David 1938-1938, I doubled over. A moan escaped me. Miriam kept me from falling. "He was my teacher. He turned on the gas jets when the Nazis came for him on *Kristallnacht*. They all died together," my voice was but a raspy whisper. In a daze I heard Edgar Kulb say:

"You know Ruth they lived in your house."

I turned toward Edgar who had walked to my side from his father's grave a few steps away. I nodded as I remembered the David family in my grandmother's apartment. They had occupied two large rooms until they finally were able to procure their own flat in another building where Jews were allowed to live. They had not moved long before they died.

"*Ja, Ja* the *Briss* was in your house too."





I could not bear to ask Edgar if it was the older or the younger boy's circumcision. Silently I stood and prayed. With tears still flooding my face I walked along with Edgar to his parents' graves. A picture began to form in my mind's eye; my father on one side of the *Bima* (platform) in the orthodox synagogue of which he was an honored official, Adolf Kulb, Edgar's father, sat on the other side of the sacred platform in a matching high backed imposing chair. I do not remember who of the two men was the president and who the vice president. They were friends to be sure, as were their sons, Edgar and my brother Walter. Oh, the mischief they got into! I could almost see the two boys run through the garden as they tried to escape our governess about to discipline them.

By now I reached the site that had been readied for the *Kaddish* for our murdered brothers and sisters. We stood close together Jew and Christian. *Georg von Pentz* softly cried as Moshe Hayoun, the synagogue's resident cantor, sang the *Kaddish* (prayer for the dead) in his sweet voice. With the prayer our hearts seemed to float up to heaven as our tears cascaded down our faces. Never has the *Kaddish* been rendered with so much feeling, so much caring and such sensitivity I thought. Moshe is such a young man but his soul is old and knows.

From there we went to the ceremony sponsored by the city. It was at the same cemetery. Uniformed honor guards laid wreaths at the foot of a rather impressive black onyx monument. Tall and slim it stood in dignity. An elongated column screaming out for justice, for remembrance. The inscription bore witness to the 2498 Jews of Stuttgart and surroundings murdered by the Nazis. Dr. Iris Jana Magdowski, mayor, spoke with reflection. She struggled to put into words the enormous guilt and responsibility she and the other officials of the present Stuttgart government feel for the evil that had been committed by their parents. Again I was reminded that the generation of Germans born after Hitler has its true repentors along-side the dangerously vocal Neo Nazis. There was a definite feeling of reverence and again the loud and clear message: *How*



*could it have happened? What can we do for you, the living?* After the soul-stirring *Kaddish* that had ended with the *Shofar* (ram's horn) calling our sanctified home, it was a bit easier for me to hear her shame and regret.

With bowed heads and lingering tears we walked back to our bus through the immaculately clean and well tended cemetery. Artistically designed stones looked as if they were sandblasted yearly. The inscriptions as clear as the day they were chiseled. The large heavy leafed trees formed a protective umbrella and the green bushes were well tended but not manicured. As I stepped out of the sanctum I was able to gently close a gate within me.





### Chapter 3

#### All Gone -- but my memories.

We were still sated from the daily complimentary, elaborate breakfast at the hotel. Ten different breads, heaps of assorted cheeses, many pounds of smoked salmon of first quality were but a part of the laden buffet table. The white fish was great. And the fish pates! Delicious in the *Kischkes*, as Samuel, my little nephew says. Our hosts must have known that the way to a Jew's heart is through the stomach. Then there was French toast with a variety of syrups and scrambled eggs. However they were off limits for me as they had ham mixed in. The soft-boiled ones were good to eat while hot. The hard ones stored well in the little fridges in our rooms for an evening snack along with other gleaned goodies. I especially welcomed the cherries, apricots, grapes, apples and many more varieties of fruit. Coffeecakes and sweet buns also hoarded well. Of course there were juices, cereals and honey- sweetened yogurt. Coffee and tea was freshly brewed and served for hours on end. This morning eating ritual served not only our food needs but was a time of getting to know each other. Despite the gastronomical feast and actually because of it I would at times suddenly feel like choking or experience the onset of a colitis attack. It was then that I would close my eyes or absent myself from the scene and in quiet privacy allow myself to merge with the spirits of those in whose honor I was making this difficult journey. After I had centered myself I would force myself to become part of the social aspect of the breakfast. Miriam and I would try to sit with different people daily. We talked about our impressions which varied greatly despite the common reason that brought us together. Some of us made plans together as we had many leisure hours between scheduled events. We could take a stroll along the vehicle-free *Koenigstrasse* with its outdoor tantalizing coffee/bakery shops, or possibly treat ourselves to a dinner in one of the superb restaurants. To pay for it we would dip into the daily allotment of \$30 each that our hosts had provided us. This morning we had decided that if we were not too tired after the cemetery trip Miriam and I would go up to the old neighborhood with Margo, a



woman who had lived a few houses from us on *Olgastrasse* when we were children. We were pretty scared. Memories have a way of crashing in uninvited.

After a bit of freshening up we set off. Thinking of the cemetery experience we silently crossed the Fifth Avenue and Via Condotti of Stuttgart. *Culver* and *Koenig* streets, indeed, were splendid with expensive shops, fine restaurants. I thought of a photo in my album of *Tante Klara* walking on *Koenigstrasse* in 1938. She was the wife of my maternal uncle Siegfried. My fur-coated aunt held the hands of two of her children and looked straight into the camera with the same determination that saw her through the death of a child from Yellow Fever and harsh, dry farming years in Palestine that were to follow.

The inner city of Stuttgart sits in a valley and is surrounded by gently sloping hills in an almost circular fashion. Among much greenery is the residential section. The higher the climb the more elegant the villas seemed to become and the more plentiful the green fruit-rich vineyards. Before we could reach the hilly area toward which we were headed we had to cross downtown. While still in the commercial district I looked at all the street signs in search. Then I saw it. We were on *Kronprinzstrasse*. How unfamiliar it looked. Yet so many warm childhood memories had their origin here. My father's wholesale dry goods business was at 30/32. On the days Papa's chauffeur did not pick up my siblings and me from school to take us home we ran, the equivalent of three blocks, to Papa. There the strong-smelling black coffee in small, silver can on a tray with a white porcelain cup and two white sugar cubes would await me. It was father's afternoon break. I was commissioned to put the cubes in and stir the dark brew with a dainty spoon. I then was given a sip and my share of the cookies that went along with this tradition. I do not remember whether either my sister Doris or brother Walter was part of this little game. Marianne the eldest was too old for such childish silliness and Gunther the baby of the family did not join us in father's office, as he did not yet attend school.





I remembered Else in her navy work uniform with her blond hair swirled into a tight knot entering father's office with sweets for us children. She was the forelady. My parents had taken her as an uneducated girl off the farm and trained her. She stayed loyal. Later on, after we children and father had escaped, she secretly smuggled food to our mother despite the fact that her Gestapo husband had forbidden her. She is gone. So too is the original building. Bombed in one of the air raids that destroyed most of the city to rubble. I was glad that the house was annihilated. At least whoever had robbed it from us did not enjoy it for long. They took my home, my childhood but never were they able to rob me of my memories. The smell of the coffee, the sugary taste of the cookies and the touch of my father's welcoming arms linger on. I turned away from the new modern high rise with its large storefront and car park on the once homey familiar site and hurried after the other women. They were taking each other's pictures in front of one of the city's numerous and fascinating fountains. This was an antique style structure and relatively small. The circular ornate wrought iron grillwork is mounted on the four-foot high stone basin. I stood and watched the water shoot up and then cascade down for a while. Then we hurried on. We headed through small intricate streets. Margo did not want to explore the erstwhile orthodox Jewish quarters near by. Miriam and I vowed that we would go on our own another day. Margo is a fierce feminist who lives in California and has no interest in the religious past of Stuttgart. But she did want to see the *Jakobschule*, which she too attended for a year or two. I vaguely remembered where the school was. A map filled in the rest.

We climbed up *Jakobstrasse* with its beer halls and restaurants. Margo was wondering why there were so many women in mini skirts or skimpy shorts and high heels standing around. "So much make-up," she would say. But she was really flabbergasted by the woman who augmented her fading youth by exposing her still voluptuous well-tanned bosom. The scanty white sweater, which plunged to cleavage depth, was expensive, as was her skin tight, corn-blue silk skirt.



Somehow Margo could not understand why an elegant woman of a certain age should be leaning bare bosomed, long legs shimmering in nakedness, against a lamppost. We finally spelled it out to the feminist who abhorred exploitation but who could not recognize a hooker.

The huge, old school stood at the far corner of the intersection. The city's logo, a magnificent black horse with its front hooves raised on a yellow background, was imprinted over the massive main door entrance. It was not until a few days later that we learned that Stuttgart had the same meaning as a similar English word. Apparently the city had started as a stud farm or *stud garden* of some renown.

By now my heart was pounding. The almost prison-like structure was as intimidating now as it was then and not only for its size. The threatening cane was clearly visible on the teacher's desk as I thought back. The dunce corner seemed to mockingly invite the little skinny Jewish girl. What a contrast I presented to the plump fair-haired strutting students. The swastika on walls, on banners on armbands were all around me. Several of the teachers wore Nazi uniforms. Right arms shot up in frenzied, fanatic salute. All but mine. My arm was tightly clutched to my body in fear. I was tense, vulnerable and as such a poor student. To them I was a none-person to be humiliated to be annihilated.

Miriam nudged me and we tried to open the door. It was locked so we walked around to another entrance facing the less bawdy part of *Jakobstreet*. It too was locked. We then made our way through the yard which seemed to double as the playground. There were children outside for recess who looked at us with obvious curiosity. Finally we found a door that opened. Once inside the school seemed even more enormous. There were so many doors. The wide exposed staircase enclosed only by a wrought iron railing could be seen winding up for four levels. I climbed up two and it was steep. The ceilings must be at least 14 feet high. The cavernous halls were virtu-





ally deserted. The occasional adult who passed did not speak to us. Margo was getting impatient and Karen her niece, who was her companion on the trip to Stuttgart, was disinterested and wanted to leave. I stopped a woman who appeared to be a teacher and explained who we were. She listened but merely told us that we might like to go to the office upstairs. It seemed anticlimactic to do anything further. There was nothing here for me. We took pictures out front and hastily climbed the rest of *Jakobstrasse* and on to the street where Margo and I had lived.

*Olgastrasse* is just as wide as I remembered. I began to run the 100 yards to number 75. I knew the house had been totally rebuilt after it had a direct hit compliments of the British Air Force. Yet, I was not prepared for this modern structure with a store and a beer-hall type restaurant on the ground floor. It was on this street level that uncle Siegfried and aunt Klara had lived in a spacious flat. Nor was there the ornate iron gate to the *Vorhof*, the yard on the left that led to the entrance of the main house. It was in this site the four-story building with a cellar and attic stood and in which we lived. Our Feldman family occupied one whole floor and three rooms on the next floor up. These upper rooms served as play area and the bed -chambers for the younger children, my brothers Walter and Gunther as well as the nurse. I remember well when I almost burned down the sunny, toy-stocked playroom in my attempt to be helpful. I had left the hot iron still plugged in resting on the cotton handkerchief.

The widow who had lived in the rest of this fourth floor flat later took over my parents' expansive six room high ceilinged apartment one floor below her previous one. Despite the fact that she had been grateful to my parents for the low rent and other kindness they had shown her in the years prior she now taunted Grandfather and Mother when they were forced to live in the unheated room in the drafty attic. A sarcastic laugh and a remark like: "Hope you and your fancy daughter can make it up those of stairs, old Jew, " accompanied Grandfather and Mother as they



wearily mounted the four flights to their cold abode. Instead of Mother drawing her Persian-Lamb coat around her shivering body, *Frau Katzenheimer*, strutted around wearing it.

I mumbled: “How does a person succumb to greed and cruelty so easily? If the shoe had been on the other foot could I too have sold my soul?” Miriam overheard me and nodded thoughtfully. Karen and Margo who had slowly sauntered along caught up by now and studied the African artifacts in the window of the shop at 75. I decided to go in and tell the owner why we were hanging around and looking the neighborhood over. He was from Ghana and as dark as the Aryans are pale. A big colorfully dressed man, a joyful presence in the drab surroundings of this ultra clean and orderly street. I was delighted. He came out and took a picture with us. He admitted that he experiences a lot of discrimination. We quickly became allies and naturally fell to speaking English. I told him how happy I was that he and not some Nazi had a store on a site that morally and most likely, legally still belonged to my family. One more link in the long chain of poetic justice that I was witnessing on this trip. With glee I recalled Georg von Pentz saying that 25% of Germany is presently made up of foreigners from Bosnia, Turkey, Nigeria, other African and third world countries. The state supports them with free housing, medical care and food. That is what makes Germany one of the highest taxed countries in the world. Thirty five percent of the Stuttgart school children do not speak German. Standing on the spot where the house I was born in had stood I almost shouted: “So take that, you heel clicking staff of *Jakobschule*. It serves you right.

Margo and her niece started up to Margo’s old apartment at the corner of *Olgastrasse* and *Wilhelmplatz*. I was not ready to go with them. I wanted to be with my memories a little longer and share them with Miriam, the understanding soul.





“See Miriam, when they rebuilt the house it became much larger and took a cobble stoned alleyway that led to the main entrance of the house and back to the large square courtyard. *Hinterhof*, it was called then. It connected the more impressive front building, to the three-story house behind. This is where Edgar, his sister and parents lived. This building carried the same address as the front house. It was the front house in which we lived. Our car was parked in the large yard under an enormous chestnut tree. There was a huge area to play tag and hide and seek.”

I grew quiet as I remembered the exuberant laughter of children jostling each other or busily picking up chestnuts to string them and decorate our *Sukkah*. This joyous childhood memory was soon replaced with a sobering dark one. I had been playing with Gretel, the girl who lived next door. My brother Walter and Gretel’s two brothers Herman and Friederich were running and jumping up and down the steps that led to our luscious garden behind the *Hinterhaus*. The race and my game came to an end when our respective mothers reminded us that it was supertime. “See you tomorrow,” they called. They did come the next day. But instead of continuing our game they drove into us with their fists and curses. What had made us into the filthy Jews, the evil outcasts over night? When we saw the older brother of the three children strut down the street in his new *Hitlerjugend*, (Hitleryouth) uniform the next afternoon, we understood. I shook my head to dispel the picture in my mind’s eye.

“Look at this mass of bricks,” I said to Miriam and pointed to the square, neat but cold-looking structure where our elegant home with its warm, lively household once had stood. “Oh, Miriam, we had two gardens. The *kleine Garten*, the little garden was not on the ground level with the yard but one floor up and it could only be entered through my grandparents’ apartment. I don’t know if there was a workshop and storage area or a part of the cellar under it.”

“Were there grass and flowers? Said Miriam.



“Oh, yes. But the flowers were only around the edge of the tall link fence. In the middle we put up the *Sukkah* each year.”

As I thought back I could almost see the little hut into which the whole family Feldman and Tanne had crowded. *Baruch Ato Adoshem* ... chanted my grandfather saying the blessing over the wine. Paper garlands that we children had cut out were strung the length and width of the 2 by 4 wooden planks that formed the base of the roof. The stars sparkled through the pine branches that covered the wooden slats and gave the hut its biblical meaning of temporary shelter. The polished red apples and silver-foil covered chestnut strings that decorated the tent-like abode seemed to laugh and shimmer. Warmth engulfed my whole being.

Miriam's voice brought me into the present. “Can you tell me a little about the holiday. Do you sleep in the *Sukkah* too?” I put my arm around my friend's thin waist, thinking how good it would be if she could fatten up a bit on this trip and directed her away from number 75. As I did so I explained *Sukkot* to her.

Margo met us in front of the house on the corner and pointed to the second floor. “That's where we lived,” she said excitedly. I could not believe that we should have lived so close to each other and not have been friends. She too did not remember me. “My father's butcher store was just around the corner. I still remember the fat German sausages I loved. He had them strung in the window next to a stuffed pig's head.” She proudly proclaimed.

Now I understood. I could almost hear my mother say: “*Ruthele*, you must never go to that girl's house or bring her here. They are *trefe*.” Ever since I could remember I knew that Jewish kids who did not eat *kosher* could not be my playmates.



I crossed back to the other side of *Olgastrasse* and went around to the far corner. The steep steps there were a short cut to upper *Alexanderstrasse*. After having mounted them there were more *Treppeles* as these sets of steps were affectionately called, until you finally reached the vineyards and woods that surrounded the town. These charming and unique accesses were all over the city. I ran up a few steps but was soon reminded that 59 years had passed since last I had done so. Reluctantly I stopped and descended amid the overhanging green branches from the trees growing alongside and allowed my breath to slow. All four of us walked up *Alexanderstrasse* that runs behind *Olgastrasse*. The street winds in a spiral fashion upward. On the right side the houses were still the original villas, albeit repaired and spruced up. On the whole this area had not been totally bombed out. I stood a long time overlooking the terrain where I figured our *Hinterhaus* with the large fruit garden had been. There still were the thirty some odd steps that had led up from the back gate of the garden to where I now was standing. But instead of the once heavily laden apple, pear and cherry trees there was an ugly, gray concrete building.

The immensity of the day finally took its toll and suddenly I felt terribly tired. "I'd like to go back to the hotel," I said with a sigh. Every one agreed. Miriam and I walked down the hill. The same one where my five-year-old brother had broken away from our nanny while we were out for a walk. My little brother had just gotten his new *Radelrutch*. This vehicle is best described as a cross between roller blades and a low floor hugging bicycle. It was made of a narrow horizontal wood strip with two low wheels on either end. In the front there was a vertical pole like piece of wood with a handlebar-- a kind of scooter. The child would stand on it with one foot and push off from the ground with the other. The hill was steep and Gunther 's face turned green as he picked up momentum and passed us. We saw him take a flying leap off his scooter. By the time we reached him, he was lying on the ground screaming. His arm hung limply. Our much loved Doctor Einstein who had not fled the country as yet, put it in a cast. Of course we painted and





drew pictures on his white chalky badge of bravery. He got a beautiful red toy car for having curbed his screams when his arm was set.

Somehow I did not want to pass 75 *Olgastrasse* again on our way back to the hotel. I remembered a route we often took when we went to school at the synagogue. We passed where the department store *Schocken* had once stood. A huge, modern store with a German sounding name had replaced it. I could not bring myself to go into it even so we passed its enticing windows many times in the two weeks that we were in Stuttgart. The memory of the last time I had seen the Jewish owned *Schocken* was too strong.

Mutti and I were together that day November 10, 1938. With Papa in hiding and my uncle having been deported to Poland, it fell on mother to check out what had happened to our department store and the whole-sale dry goods business on *Kronprinzstrasse* during the past night, The Night of the Broken Glass.

My father had accomplished the difficult and expensive task of becoming a German citizen two years before Hitler came to power. Our department store had been originally called *Kadep*. My maternal uncle, Siegfried Tanne, had part ownership. Father was like that. My mother's whole family became successful in Dad's business ventures for which he had worked hard to start. Later the store had to undergo restructuring and a name change and became known as *Kaufhaus Tanne*. While I am not certain I believe this was because a Jewish business could no longer be incorporated and have gentile board members. While my father once coveted German citizenship he and the family now thought it would be safer to put the store in my uncle's name because he was Polish. What irony! My father had been a Polish citizen before he changed it. Nor did being foreign save my uncle. He was expelled during Germany's purge of Polish Jews in October 38 along with his parents Opa and Oma Tanne. If I recall correctly Grandfather's own little dry



goods store was either confiscated or Father closed it soon after their deportation. It had been important for my proud grandfather to sell his own shoelaces in order to support himself. Thus beholden to no man he could cover his small needs and with clear conscience study his beloved *Torah*.

Before my mother and I reached either of our businesses we came upon a ravaged *Schocken* that morning of the tenth. A wild crowd was pushing and shoving their way through the broken store windows. It was a sight of a crowd gone bestial. Faces contorted into greedy grimaces. Feet stomping over people who had fallen and grinding the windowpanes into millions of snow-like crystals. With howls like animals pouncing on their defeated prey they plundered wildly. For a few moments we watched in horror hiding behind a *Kiosk*. With dread we realized that the same fate must have befallen all Jewish businesses including ours. We thought it best to seek cover. As unobtrusively as we could we hurried home and stayed in the house until the madness subsided and the next phase became more orderly but just as evil.

I did not want to remember any more today. We both had had enough. Miriam was visibly affected by the events of the day. I too was emotionally drained and physically exhausted. By the time we reached the *Rotbuhlplatz* we were dragging our feet. This was the main hub of the city. Cars whizzed by in every direction and the traffic lights were busy and confusing since they controlled the six streets that converged on this intersection. We were very hungry by now, while only a seven-minute walk from the hotel we simply had to sit down and get some fuel into us. We chose a modern, clean fast fish food restaurant. It quickly became our *Stammplatz*. *Stammplatz* because we ate there almost every day from then on.

The dome-like structure had several high counter tables and barstools just inside its glass walls and outside on the sidewalk. We perched ourselves on stools closest to the food. Eagerly we eyed





the array of fresh fish that looked as if they had just swum in and came to rest on the heaps of glistening ice on the circular buffet. Kale, parsley, yellow and red vegetables decorated the spread. The hot plates with aromatic Saffron rice and fries sent up clouds of steam, while the cool coleslaw and green salads promised to be refreshing on this summer night. I felt very virtuous having rice and salad with my salmon that had been grilled to perfection, but could not resist sampling a few fries from Miriam's plate.

We quickly made our way through the lobby of the hotel without stopping to chat with several of our trip mates who stood around. As we unlocked our respective doors we simultaneously let out a loud: "Oh no!" A blast of noise coming from the open windows had greeted us. The hoopla had started for tonight. It was international soccer match time and lasted for the two weeks that we were in Germany. With so many different ethnic groups present in Stuttgart there were many rooters and hissers. Our rooms were on the first floor facing a narrow downtown busy street. We kept our windows wide open because there was no air-conditioning. Even ordinary conversation from the street below sounded as if it was in the same chamber. How much more so car doors slamming, horns blowing, metal objects being clanged together and accompanied by hooting howls.

The outer commotion and my inner turmoil brought on by the day's events made sleep impossible despite my tiredness. After a while I took a sedative. Eventually I drifted off and soon rode the dream-express to the land of submerged memories; there, where images lived that were untainted by consideration, logic and judgment, there, where impressions long since stored could weave their free-form dance.



## Chapter 4

### Night Journey

I scooted through time and saw myself sitting in the *Kleine Theater* almost next door to my father's department store. Why it was called the Little Theater I never knew. It seemed awfully grand and elegant to me with its rows of velvet seats. This was the first time I was out by myself. It had taken a lot of begging and pouting which left Mother unmoved but melted Father. So here I sat in my orange wool-crepe Cossack tunic nervously running my fingers over the hand-embroidered bib and high neck. My hands could almost feel the vibrant colors of the tiny stitches. I remember looking at my last birthday's new watch to check how much longer I had to wait for the anticipated event that was to start. I made quite a show of self-importance age eleven style. I unbuttoned the needle point cuffs into which the full Russian style sleeves were gathered and exposed the treasure on my left wrist. The curtain went up just then. She ran on to the stage in her bare feet her wide skirt swirling and I was hooked forever. Forgotten was the sinister Nazi climate that raged outside this hall. I was aglow with the turns and twists with contractions and releases with which Mary Wigman, the famous modern dancer, related her stories. There was none of the melodrama and tutu frilliness reminiscent of classical ballet. The over stretched neck of the ballerina and her limbs strained into unnatural poses were not part of the immediacy and truth of expression of this dance form. The die was cast. Many years later, in 1972, I sponsored Til Thiele, a great dancer in her own right and who, at that time ran Mary Wigman's studio in walled-in Berlin, to come to Canada and join my newly opened school.

I do not remember who picked me up from the theater that Sunday afternoon for I was not allowed to come home alone. But I remember I was burning with passion and bubbled with plans. Mother was very clever and said nothing. But at the first opportunity when I deserved punishment for a minor infraction I was no longer allowed to continue the dance classes that I had at-



tended for a few years. After all, a nice Jewish girl from an orthodox home had to be discouraged from her dream to go on the stage. It was OK as long as it was only a childish recreation. I pleaded and cried for Mutti to change her mind and only gave up when the Jewish Bloch Studio was forced to close. After that I did my dancing and acting in the privacy of a small-secluded corner on the veranda in front of my parents bedroom.

To get to my hideout I had to travel the long corridor with its many doors. I passed the portal of my eldest sister's domain behind which were rows and rows of my sister's beloved books. They were forbidden to us younger siblings but we longed to discover the mysteries that held my sister's avid attention. But not now! I hurried on past the *Herrenzimmer*, the salon where special guests were received. It also that doubled for a music room as it held our piano. A huge muted color tapestry of a romantic scene in tiny petite point stitches covered the wall behind the deep-green velvet couch. A pair of graceful, elegantly matching chairs faced the settee. The large round table was the focus point. I loved that room and usually quickly opened the door and peeked in as I passed. From there I only had to get around the huge bathroom at the top of the corridor. Finally I was in my inner sanctum and spread my arms not like a swan but like an African dancer in prayer for rain. Hands flexed at the wrist and body contracting and releasing my inner world began to render itself in movement.

My dream skipped forward to a few days after The Night of the Broken Glass. I was still in my private theatre when I sensed a disturbance in the apartment. Interrupting my reclusive performance and careful not to be seen I approached the window and peeked into the bedroom. I saw my mother with tears in her eyes and fear tightening her beautiful face. There was no trace of her sweet, comforting smile. A stomping noise announced two *Brownshirts*. S.A. men with swastikas on their arm bands. The image of the horse back riding-type britches and a leather strap across the uniformed chest of each of the invaders seared into my memory. The first Nazi





seemed to be no older than 18. The second zealot mirrored his flaxen crew cut and even features. He was not much older and even more muscular than his counterpart. His clenched jaw giving him a determined and aggressive expression. A surrealistic picture of the perfect Aryans--a parody of themselves.

*"Geschwind jetzt,"* barked the younger pointing to two already almost filled baskets.

Slowly as if pulling a heavy weight she opened the door to the huge, reddish-blond fruit wood closet. The shelves within held her personal and intimate belongings. The two S.A. men reached in and began to remove items. Mother stepped back and averted her eyes. I ducked into the room and stood next to her taking her hand.

The jewelry was not merely dumped into the baskets but carefully placed on top of the many gold and silver Judaic art effects that had already been confiscated and placed in the container. The ruby, sapphire and jade rings that mother had saved for each of her three daughters as well as the pearls my father had given her at the birth of my eldest sister followed. The diamond necklace, an anniversary gift, received the same treatment.

On the way out one of the uniformed machines pointed to my mother's wedding ring. Mother pulled her hand back and muttered: *"Erlaubt!"*

The second man then barked: "Permitted! Not on the list!"

Yes, list. My mother had been forced by a decree issued earlier to register all our valuables. Not to have done so was unthinkable, as the threat of punishment was great.



Their evil task concluded they had strutted out carrying with them the material evidence of a family devoted to love for each other and for their religion. Having barely recovered from this scene, suddenly by the illogical sequence of dream-travel I found myself in our huge dining room at the end of the hall. No longer dancing. Just a little girl standing in a room in which she seemed to belong.

There was the couch on which I often fell asleep during a wintry *Shabbat* afternoon. Nearby stood Papa's matching burgundy leather armchair. Sometimes he held two of us on his lap while the others crawled all over him. Our long oak dining room table with its tapestry-upholstered chairs were the central focal point of the family. Here the holidays were celebrated. At the table we ate and said the blessings, we met in conversation, learned and were forged by a tradition that fed faith, trust, and above all love. That love which saved us all to survive the Nazi hell and steeled us for the lonely, painful aftermath of rebuilding lives tortured by memories.

A wood buffet and a huge sideboard with a tall superstructure that barely cleared the high European ceilings of the time flanked the carved table. Despite their size the furniture did not crowd the large room. I almost could feel myself smiling in my dream as I saw myself climb onto the back of the armchair. From there I mounted the two spiral poles that supported the superstructure of the sideboard. My long skinny limbs were reminiscent of a monkey as they scaled upwards. My goal was a hidden shelf at the top of the high piece of furniture. It was very far up for someone as small as I was.

I must have been seven years old. Father spoiled us terribly and could not resist bringing bars and bars of chocolate home. He gave in to mother and would hide part of our weekly supply. The day the hidden shelf first revealed itself to me, just how I do not know unless a chocoholic develops a sixth sense about such things, I had exhausted all other hiding places. Among the likely





spots I had already checked out was our piano. There, a week before while reluctantly practicing, I had hit a note that to me sounded sour but proved to be chocolate-sweet. Upon lifting the lid of the upright I was rewarded with many bars. One of which I devoured immediately, thus lowering the count that I had to divide up. However, the afternoon that I found myself hanging from the ceiling clutching the pole, had not rendered the hidden treasure for which I had been searching. Egged on by my siblings, who always allotted two extra portions to me for being a successful super snoop, and with pride and my sweet tooth at stake, I was convinced that I was on the right track. I had no choice but to reach the magic shelf. Carefully I extended my arm and with one hand grasping the column I felt around with the other. After two tries I touched a heap of chocolate bars. I removed several of the many but left enough so that Father would not suspect. The new hiding place appeared to be an extension of our department store's chocolate counter.

What a marvel to flit through a childhood with its trillion memories in the span of one night of reverie! I went from gorging on chocolate to writhing with pain on the couch. Spastic colitis inherited from Father was the medical diagnosis. Sympathy and special attention, especially from mother, when I was in the throws of a severe attack, were most comforting. So much so that it must have been hard for the adults, or for that matter for me, to ascertain just when the cramps were strictly organic and when emotion-induced. In either case the hurting was real.

Oh, that room where we did our living! Here was my father singing out the *Kiddush* in his melodious, love-filled voice and giving all of us a sip of the hallowed wine. Mother holding her hands over the *Shabbat* flames while murmuring a blessing and then kissing each child. How could such a gentle touch on my bowed head have left an imprint for all the years that followed? In my dream-journey, as I passed the *Seder*-scene, I saw father wearing a white *Kittel*, the ceremonial cotton smock, and a large skullcap, leaning on his left side in a massive armchair. The same chair I used as a launching-site to climb the pole to my chocolate kingdom. Only now a white sheet



drawn over it transformed the seat. A sanctified dais from which father, my personal and first rabbi, recited the *Haggadah*. The legend of the Exodus from Egypt came to life every year and as young as I was I felt this was not just the telling of a story. I saw her, that girl who was I back then, through dream-lenses that cut through the time warp. The pale girl with straight brown hair and green burning eyes lulled by the rhythm of the chant and sipping wine from her tiny cup. Not until years later was she to realize that she was drinking in the very essence of Passover. But back then she was totally true to her child-state. She watched for the moment that her father would hide the *Afekomin*. Then she moved like lightening so as not to be beaten out by a sibling and “stole” the sacred *Matza* that Father just set aside. Without this special *Matza* the Seder could not be completed. Was that eight year-old really me, who so cleverly bargained for the coveted ballerina doll in exchange for the return of the *Afekomin*?

My dream patron, for there must be a spiritual donor of this mystical night-journey, seemed to whisper into the core of my consciousness below the sleep state: “It is at the feet of your parents and ancestors and at such ancient rituals as the *Seder* that your soul underwent its nurturing, its schooling. You are the slave who journeyed through the test-ridden desert. You are the one who must go through the cleansing process yearly and renew your right to freedom. You were present at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the commandments. The seeds of the Teaching, the *Torah* is *within you*.”

Because dreaming is not subject to time or association I was scooted back into that awesome dining room again. About age six I saw myself standing in front of the green ceramic-tiled stove that dominated the whole corner to the right of the entrance. It reached almost to the ceiling but had just enough clearing to be fireproof. I was screaming and reaching my arms upward. My siblings stood by laughing hilariously. One of them had managed to grab my treasured *Schmatte* (security blanket) away from me and thrown it or placed it with the aid of a broom on top of the



stove. As I am writing this dream my logic tells me that it must have been summertime since my security blanket did not catch fire. Suddenly loud shouting and March music filled my dream. I saw Mother look into the street from behind the drawn velvet drapes. Her face was so strange and why was she crying? She and Father now were crowding around the radio. Papa put his finger on his mouth to silence us and pointed in the direction of the kitchen where the maid was washing up--the maid who soon had to leave our household. To preserve the Aryan race was the given reason. Doris, my older sister shut the door. The joyful dream-sojourn through my childhood had become a mosaic smashed into disconnected fragments. Shouts, screams, marching boots, leaping flames fed by *Torah* scrolls. Swastikas were swarming through the air attached to arms beating down on a crouching man. *Brown-Shirts* marched in Hitler salute up the stairs into our house.

Mercifully I awoke. My eyes shied away from the summer daylight that streamed into the room. Where was I? The traffic and the guttural speech from voices in the hall were foreign to my ears. Through half closed lids I saw my open suitcase next to a closet. My soft -yellow, linen tunic hung over a white pencil line skirt on a hanger on a hook. Coordinated shoes, a matching print hat; pearls and earrings were placed next to it on the dresser. Seeing the clothes that looked as if all I had to do was leap out of bed and into them, I slowly remembered. I am in Stuttgart at the Hotel Wartburg and in less than an hour we were to be taken to the castle at Ludwigsburg. From there we drove to Freudental. This village was one of the earliest Jewish communities in that region and the place where I spent several summers as a child





## Chapter 5

### Poetic Justice

The weather was delicious, one of those perfects cloudless summer days. It was not too hot and the humidity was low. The bus rode through sloping green fields and castles perched on top of mountains. But as always on this trip tears and an ache that contracted the heart were never far away. We sat in the small synagogue in Freudental, now rebuilt and heard the story of its demise. We also heard that it was the oldest synagogue of historical meaning in the country. A cemetery was there as early as 1723. By 1870 there were 877 Jews. Half of the inhabitants were Jewish. It was the Center of Jewish life, this little village north of Stuttgart. There had been no ghetto here. As the speaker told of the glorious Jewish past of this area I saw a little skinny girl in a light green summer dress skipping along the street. It had been an orthodox community. No wonder that it was here that my grandparents came many times for vacation so many years ago whenever they did not go to Freudenstadt in the Black Forest. We children sometimes visited them. Then came the story of destruction of the Freudental Jewish Community. Thirteen Torahs burned. All Jews had to kneel in a circle around the burning holy scrolls. Devastating photos followed. I wanted to run and keep running. There had been so many frozen images in the last few weeks of my brethren being brutally beaten and our houses of worship violated. I didn't leave. Instead I listened to the speaker and looked at photos.

The synagogue could not be burned down, because there were houses of German citizens adjacent that might have ignited. Instead they let a horde of wild beasts loose to hack the sanctuary to pieces. Out of guilt the present population of the small town did not use this original synagogue for a recreation hall. They rebuilt it and left a white wall and empty space in the place of the *Shulchan Aaron*, the cabinet containing the *Torahs*, and dedicated it as a memorial. The vacant space carries the unspoken message, 'it is gone, nothing is here any longer.' This stark blankness



often leads to the first question from the many students who come from surrounding towns to visit the shrine. After the soft-spoken speaker who was also the custodian and the honorable soul who had fought the town-fathers from appropriating the building for a sports arena had given his compassionate talk we were treated to a concert. The music was a welcome salve in this sad moment of remembrance. Silently we filed out of the small building and headed to the old Jewish cemetery. The Hebrew inscriptions were barely legible in many cases. Yet they screamed their presence. They immortalized their history.

It was a relief to forget for a little while. A superb lunch at the charming village Restaurant Wolfsberg gave me this respite. George, our fine host, had arranged the luncheon with the same tact and sensitivity with which he had planned our whole itinerary. There was fish for the orthodox among us. Pork products were always absent in the lunches or dinners to which we were invited. We were served the best of wines and the meal was excellent. Afterwards we took a magical boat trip along the Neckar. The vibrant greenery along the shores of the wide river, the angle of the sun made for a breathtaking view. We came to a stop but were told we had not arrived at the end of our cruise yet. Suddenly I heard a woman next to me gasp and the boat and my stomach dropped at the same time. I grabbed for my hat that was about to fly off. Someone called out: "It is a lock, come see!"

Quickly I went over to the side and saw that the boat was floating between two high barricades. The water was much higher behind the walls that stemmed the river. It seemed that we had dropped some 20, to 30 feet. I had never seen any thing like it before and felt like a child with a new toy. Soon we were raised again and the river was wide open to us.

When we got back to the hotel via our faithful bus it was almost *Shabbat*. It was then that I found the lovely surprise of two miniature freshly baked *challahs* wrapped in white tissue paper and





tied with a blue ribbon. An exquisite card wishing Miriam and me a *Shabbat Shalom* accompanied the gift. Petra, our new friend who teaches the synagogue's Kindergarten children, had really outdone herself. Her kindness was a healing touch to that deep and wounded part in me.

I did not go to synagogue that evening since I knew that I would be there a good part of the next day. Exhausted from all the time travel of the night before and the long stimulating day I fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

After the morning service the synagogue community invited us for lunch. How moving to hear the *Kiddush* on the grounds that once had housed my school. Of the 2000 members most were Russian Jews and represented a huge and noisy crowd. The *gefillte* fish, herring, cold cuts, raw vegetables and *challahs* were delicious. Not so all of the speeches. A type of formality and discipline that reminded me so acutely of Nazi Germany prevailed and disturbed me. It started with the rabbi smashing his hand onto the table with a very loud and forceful shout: "Silence!"

The look in his face shocked me even more than the noise. Was it anger or something even worse? Someone sitting not far from me whispered to the woman next to him:

"He sure has it in for the Russians."

This was *Shabbat*, the day of peace and he was the rabbi. The same one who referred to Germany as our *Vaterland* in the speech at the town hall earlier in the week. With all due respect his address to the guests this *Shabbat* was filled with sincere words of welcome and an understanding of our difficulty to return to the land of our nightmares. However, somehow I had trouble getting around what seemed to me an unwarranted if not hostile, attitude of the rabbi. I also had difficulty with some remarks from Mr. Tenne, the president of the Jewish community. He made



it sound, at least to my ears, that this was the erstwhile synagogue of our childhood. It was not so for at least 1/3 of us returnees. We, and I am one of them, were of East European origin and mostly orthodox. It was my childhood impression that the people who had attended the temple that stood on this site were ashamed of us. It was an ultra reform temple and made up almost completely of “*pure*” German Jews. They also looked down on the orthodox German born Jews. Neither my grandfather’s *Rosenstrasse Shul* with its all *Yiddish* speaking members nor the new orthodox synagogue that Father helped form and which was made up of both orthodox Germans and orthodox Eastern Europeans have been rebuilt. Nor was their history honored. Neither Rabbi Berger nor Mr. Tenne hardly if at all mentioned Rabbi Bamberger and us, the members of his congregation.

My parents were good citizens of their adopted country but they did not put the *Vaterland* above our religion and God. My distinguished looking father wore English tailored suits. He was beardless and wore a very proper German mustache. Mother was fashionably dressed. Large, dramatic hats graced her small-featured lovely face. I admire them for their ability to have been true to their faith and rituals while respectful of the customs of the country in which they lived. They did not have to assimilate, intermarry, or drop their *Mitzvot* (laws) such as *kashrut* (kosher) to be good citizens. Both made every effort to speak German properly while never forgetting or be ashamed of *Yiddish*, their mother tongue.

Listening to the speakers I felt estranged and could not relate to them or the German language and culture that permeated the synagogue and seemed to be in conflict with the Eastern European Jews. As soon as I could I left the hall and wandered around the building. I found myself standing in front of a large sculptured plaque covering a wall in front of the sanctuary. It was a monument to the Jewish soldiers who had served in the German army during the First World War. As I stood there looking at carved German soldiers and chiseled names I became acutely



aware that there was something missing in the synagogue building. I had the same feeling earlier while walking around the sanctuary. Now I knew. Where was the plaque to remember the many members and other Stuttgart Jews who had been victims of the Nazi era? I looked alongside this plaque but there was nothing. I went into the sanctuary again. Nothing! Later I was told by one of the Jewish Community executives that there is no monument anywhere in the building. “But there is one at the cemetery,” he said. “It is a memorial for all who perished in the city.”

If my memory serves me he also told me that it included the entire province. I knew whereof he spoke as we had visited and had the formal ceremony there. However it was my understanding that it was the city and not the Jewish community who had erected it. Upon questioning one of the synagogue officials I was told with a measure of pride that the World War 1 monument had survived the destruction of the synagogue during *Kristallnacht* in 1939 and therefore held an honored place. My stomach contracted and pain seared through me as I thought of the flaming *Torahs* which did not survive that evil day of devastation. I sighed and slowly walked out of the building. Beset with a sense of loneliness I wondered why I was so different. None of the others seemed to notice the absence of a plaque with the names of the massacred one-time members. Yet, soldiers in German uniforms, albeit World War 1 uniforms, hold an honored place. What made it even harder was that several of the returnees identified more with those German soldiers than with their other Jewish brethren. I still hear the clear tones of the California voice that held only a trace of a German accent during breakfast in the hotel the day before say:

“I can’t help it I simply don’t like these people.”

She was referring to several orthodox Israelis in our party whose parents had come from Poland but who like myself were born in Germany.





I stood outside the synagogue waiting for Miriam to return from her morning of exploring Stuttgart's spectacular fountains. People began to come out of the synagogue. Walking down the steps was the charming family I had sat with during lunch: grandparents, daughter and granddaughter along with the latter's Kindergarten teacher, Petra. I went to greet them. Earlier we had had unsuccessfully tried to converse above the din. While our attempt at verbal communication had been a failure I did come away with a good feeling about this family. Now speaking to them in the street my first impression was confirmed. They are charming, warm cultured and well educated. The man and, I believe, his daughter too, were engineers. The mother was very active in the Association for Christian and Jewish Cooperation. She was a well-spoken woman with a command of several languages. I learned that they were Polish Jews. I am not sure if they were old enough to have been in the camps or were born right after their parents were liberated. I told them that I was so happy that they were Eastern European and further expressed my positive feelings about them. They looked at me with great surprise. While their good manners did not allow them to say anything overtly negative about the Jewish community to which they belonged I sensed a kinship between us.

"Why are you saying that?" the woman asked me in a kindly tone.

"Because I lived among German Jews as a tainted child because I was of Polish Jewish extraction." I went on to explain just how it had been in the old days and that I felt that nothing much had changed in this regard. We spoke for quite a while and my respect and liking for them grew with each moment. They confirmed my observation that indeed a sense of inequality among the present Jewish community exists. As we parted we expressed our appreciation for having met. But just before we went our separate ways I gave my parting shot, which actually represented my conclusion of life in Germany today.



“*Poetic Justice*; a true pleasure for me to see the once elitist German liberal temple turn into this orthodox synagogue overrun by “*Ost-Juden*.”

For a moment I reflected and before any one else could speak I added, “Just like the many Germans who once delighted in helping Hitler get rid of the Jews and who now moan about the endless stream of refugees from Africa, the Balkans and Turkey that Germany must absorb and support.” I took a breath and hurried on. “A woman I spoke with yesterday stated that the Jews were much smaller in number and much more productive citizens than this new influx.”

My new friends nodded with a knowing smile on their faces. They called after me, “ Bye until tomorrow in *Bad Cannstatt*.”

The next afternoon I was engrossed in conversation with a representative from the Christian and Jewish Association. I felt a gentle hand on my arm and the older of the two new women friends from yesterday leaned over my shoulder and put a gift-wrapped parcel in front of me. I opened it and the *Kursaal* (the social hall), the vibrant conversation and even the scrumptious slice of strawberry cake on my plate, became background. I held a book of photographs of Polish Jews, their little towns and their way of life, before the Nazis wiped them all out. A tear dropped from my eye and fell on the old bearded man’s face. His deep, knowing eyes looked up at me from the picture, “No I will not forget you and I will speak of you and tell your story of life as well as your death,” I silently vowed. I looked at the first page again and there was my vow mirrored in the inscription. My new friend begged me to remember our ancestors and tell others of the beauty and strength that once were our people.

After I managed to stem my tears I turned back to my neighbor with whom I had been speaking before and heard yet another tale of survival. A very different one and one I had never con-





fronted before. Again I was to learn never to judge. I think it is this lesson and other such tests that made the trip really worthwhile for me.

I shall call the woman Johanna. She tells me that she comes from Freudenstadt. She is Christian and has been working with the association that is sponsoring this tea in Bad Cannstatt. She has a very German last name.

“My father’s name was Levy. I loved him very much and we were a close family. My Mutti was Christian but devoted to Papa and wanted to go with him when Papa was rounded up. Actually because of Mutti and the many Christian friends in Freudenstadt Papa was not taken until much later than the other Jews there. He was never to come back. Before he left he made us promise to change our name to our mother’s last name and move away. He made us promise.” Her last sentence was but a whisper. I could feel her pain cut through my skin.

“The worst of it,” she went on with a sigh, “is the identity crisis I underwent and still suffer from. Mine is a secret pain. I am said to be a German yet I feel myself to be also a Jew. I know people wonder if my parents were Nazis as every one must think of Germans of my parents’ generation.”

Now her pain became personal for I too had thought of her as “*the other*” and wondered about her past affiliation. I reached across and closed the gap by holding her hand in mine. Not only a new friendship but a soul connection was born.

I took a walk around the well-landscaped grounds and stopped to watch the bathers in the large curative mineral water. A glass wall surrounded the pool. The sulfa vapor drew a cloud of steam above the water.



Miriam and I needed a break from the scheduled program and used the next day to go back to the old Jewish section that we had skirted when we went to visit the “*Jakobschule*.”

“One more week before we go home,” I muttered “and I still have not found out where the final camp was to which Opa was sent. I asked many people but no one has heard about *Maly Trostinec*. I also have not found where *Tante Friedel* ended up.”



## Chapter 6

### Verschollen

“What’s your next move?” My friend asked as we approached the erstwhile quarter where the orthodox had lived and prayed. The *Judenviertel*, the old Jewish section was now a fashionable antique shop district. For the moment I could not answer Miriam. We had come to the spot where I believed our synagogue had stood. My feet became rooted and I felt as if I would never leave here. Metaphorically speaking I never had left or ever would. This was where my character was molded and my inner core became strong like steel in faith and determination—qualities that were to keep me alive through the hard and bitter years that were to follow.

Who could not be impressed by the elders of the *Stiebel* (small intimate neighborhood synagogue) donning their *Tallesim* (prayer shawls) as their bodies began to rhythmically rock in prayer? The grown men dancing with the holy scrolls held high fascinated the child I was then. Shining upturned faces spoke their love for *Hashem*. And we children on the birthday of the *Torah*, caught up in the fervor, waved little flags and gathered up the candy that rained on us from the women’s section.

The women in my childhood were not weak and submissive. They were the nurturing force behind the men in the home and often the wise advisor and silent but much appreciated partner even in business and synagogue matters. Their devotion and surrender in strength and not weakness had a subtle presence in our lives. Actually my mother’s valor saved four of her children and her husband, even herself. It was she who opposed my father and registered us at the American Consulate. At this point my eldest sister was already out of Germany in a *Kibbutz* in Israel. How angry my father was! He did not want to leave Germany. It will all pass, he tried to assure us. He smashed a chair in his fury to be contradicted by Mother. Yet she stood fast. She was





convinced the situation was getting worse and a war was coming. She did this before *Kristallnacht* but shortly after the Austrian *Anschluss* in March 38. No! The women who were my models were not weak.

When I think of the orthodox synagogue on *Rosenstrasse* I associate it with my maternal grandfather. Here was his haven that fed and validated him. He was a quiet man with fine small facial features and neatly groomed white beard. Well-tailored dark suits clothed his erect frame. He walked with his head held high. Yet, there was a humility and gentleness in his movements. He taught us Judaism by living it. But even more than religion, he taught us a Zen type of living in the here and now. "When you eat you eat and when you read you read," he said as he removed the book from my hands while eating at the dining room table. I learned not only to respect laws and tradition but also to honor those who taught me.

In 1936 or 1937, Cantor Zanger, my father and family and many of the younger congregates established a new and larger synagogue. It was more modern but just as orthodox. Many orthodox Jews of German origin were part of this new prayer house. From the women's section that was a few steps up we could peer through the curtains and see Papa and Mr. Kulb on their chairs on the Bima. We were important enough now to merit synagogue officials. How proud I was that Papa held such an honored position. Our strict but fair and kind Rabbi Bamberger was still our rabbi. Along side the formal teaching there was so much warmth and color.

As I stood there in the middle of the street I started to hum the *Avenu Malkenu* as only our beloved Cantor Zanger could sing it. In my many years of synagogue attendance that followed I never heard it sung so exquisitely again. The music in my head changed to the somber chant of the *Kol Nidre*. How majestic yet humble our Cantor with the awesome voice appeared to me in his white robe on *Yom Kippur*.



Just then I remembered that yesterday I was looking for the names of my relatives in the book that listed the life and where possible, the death, of each Stuttgart Jew during the Third Reich. Among so many familiar names in the death column was Cilly Zanger. While my memory is vague I believe she was the cantor's daughter. It is listed that she was nine when she died during the family's deportation to Poland in 1938. The same deportation to which so many of my family members fell victim. The memories rushed in like a river. And I struggled to keep afloat lest the gushing current would seize me. With every drop of effort I could muster I disciplined my voice to speak above the vortex that had claimed my emotions and brought me into the present.

"If I'm up for it later I'll speak with Arno Fern. He's the director of the Community Services at the synagogue," I said to Miriam. "I'm told they have lists that go beyond the book I bought yesterday. You know that large, thick black one about the Jews of Stuttgart? It is called *Weg und Schicksal der Stuttgarter Juden*. My father and all my relatives are recorded in it. In the book I found out that Opa, born in 1864 in *Rozniatov* in Poland was taken from his attic room and moved three times. First he was sent to a suburb of Stuttgart which seemed to have been a Jewish-Ghetto type old-age internment place. Then he was sent to *Teresienstadt* in August 1942. From there he was transported again one month later. It stated "*Nach dem Osten abgeschoben* destination *Mali Trostinec*" (sent to the east). Nor did it state for certain that he died there. It said, *Vermuted Tod* (assumed dead)."

It is strange that worlds of connected thought and experiences can flash through your mind in a matter of a second. Suddenly the image of my grief-altered mother who had joined us in October 1941 in our dreary, cockroach invested apartment in the East-Bronx in New York City descended like a dark cloud and engulfed me. Her near hysterical cries to take Opa's picture down and not to speak his name echoed in my ears.





“I only wanted to make her happy,” I whispered silently.

We had learned very quickly that we must not mention Opa’s name in front of Mutti. Her pain over grandfather’s fate was hard for us children to watch. We still struggled with our own hurt. The two-year separation from her and what we went through during that time had deeply wounded us too. I had been injured during an air raid in London in 1940. The ankle, which never healed properly, was minor to my emotional scars. We never knew if Mother was still alive or in a camp. Occasionally a letter from her would reach us through the U.S. and the Red Cross.

I was fragile in those early years in New York. It was bitter to be a refugee especially for a teenager who wanted to be like her peers. Nothing could be further away. However the disintegration of our family’s emotional health into the pit of grief was even worse than what went on in the world outside like school and work. My mother’s sorrow turned into depression and my father’s sense of shame for being a small grocery owner in an erstwhile Jewish neighborhood which now was not much more than a tenement area did not allow for any social life. We children were afraid to bring friends to the house. Our once warm household in Stuttgart that had fed every Jewish traveler who came to our city and needed a *kosher* meal now never had guests. No longer were there the joyous holiday celebrations. Certainly we had a *Seder* but the heart had gone out of it. Mother became more and more religious and spent her *Shabbats* in synagogue without father or us children who did not want to accompany her. The rest of the day she spent crying. Father no longer honored the Sabbath and poured all his energy into his store. Our physical environment was pretty grim too. Instead of the Persian carpets of my childhood home, worn linoleum covered the floors of our run-down apartment. The cheap furniture was a far cry from our upholstery in Stuttgart. Yet as bitter as it was we were alive. For that all of us were grateful. But our youth wanted more. In time each of us four children who lived in the United States, Doris,



Walter and Gunther whose Americanized name was now Bernie and I, found our own ways of coping until years later we could escape from the house on 863 Beck Street.

However while we were all still home it got worse before it got better. Shortly after the war a man from Stuttgart who had survived several camps contacted mother and told her that he had seen her father alive in *Teresienstadt* in 1942 but had lost track of him.

Was Opa dead or alive? There was no *Kaddish*. The prayer for the dead could only be said if one was certain that he had left this world.

This uncertainty tortured mother. When speaking his name do we add *of blessed memory* or a similar phrase that we use to honor our dead? Her torment grew and she became more and more fanatically religious. How torn I was between filling in for my father and keeping her company, listening to her -- wiping her tears-- and wanting a life of my own.

A deep sigh brought me back to *Rosenstrasse* the street of roses and Miriam. While sharing some of my recent thoughts we continued to explore the area and took photos. We stopped a long time in front of the sign on the corner. It read, *Fruhere Judengasse so genannt in 1350*, (Jew Lane thus named in 1350). We never did find our way to *Schlosserstrasse* where the new synagogue had stood. Again pain moved in as I remembered. During *Kristallnacht* our beautiful new synagogue was demolished --our Torah scrolls burned. Father was hunted like an animal. They wanted him, the man of faith and official of Jewish community service. He was not caught in the raids that November. He hid in train lavatories and the attic of a British citizen provided a refuge for a few days. The Polish consulate in Munich where my cousin worked was another haven for a short time. When the raids were called off my father came home and had a heart attack from which he recovered but only physically. The same happened to one of my teachers. He did not



recover. So many disappeared. So many died that terror-stricken week. For me the world had changed forever and on some level I never fully recovered from the shock. My very body chemistry was altered and I have struggled with healing myself to this day.

Suddenly a longing for my daughter back home in Canada overwhelmed me. She represented the now—the good. One so sensitive that it was impossible for her to make this trip with me. It was she who chose Miriam as my companion. Miriam who is twelve years older than Jackie and fourteen younger than I is a true friend to both of us. Jackie refers to her as her sister--my other daughter. Tomorrow morning I will call Jackie, I promised myself. How good it will be to hear her voice even though I just spoke with her yesterday.

“Let’s get back, Miriam, and have a bite to eat. This excursion into the Jewish quarter was really intense.”

“Oh yes, let’s!” Miriam agreed.

In a lower voice I said: “After lunch I will see what I can find out about them.” It was not until we had ordered our food that I started to tell Miriam the story about Tante Friedel.

“I never even called her aunt--just Friedel. She was so young. She was just a few years older than my oldest sister Marianne. Mother often told us that Grandma was pregnant with Friedel at my mother’s wedding. My sister and her child-aunt were very close, more like sisters, as Friedel spent much time upstairs in our apartment. She married, I think it was early in the thirties. They lived in Hagen, Westphalia. During the *Kristallnacht* round up her husband Morris was taken to Dachau. They had a daughter called Ruth about five years old at that time. Friedel was pregnant with her second child.”





I took a deep breath and watched the child at the next table happy in her innocence hugging her doll.

I continued: "I remember my little cousin. Will I ever forget the day when the heavy-booted uniformed Stormtroopers stomped up our freshly scrubbed and waxed parquet steps? It was right after *Kristallnacht*, possibly the next day. They came for my father who had fled the house. They also wanted to check our library for forbidden books. I was terrified when they entered the room because Friedel's little Ruthele, was taking a nap on the couch in there."

I halted my story telling for a moment and took time to I savor the memory of my little cousin. "I sometimes took her for a walk. I almost can still feel how heavy the carriage was to push uphill to the little park," I said as if speaking to myself.

"What happened? Did they hurt her?" Miriam said coming back to the Nazis in our library.

"No they didn't. Can you imagine a 12-year-old pale faced Jewish girl saying to two tall blond S.A. men, 'The little girl is sleeping please don't wake her.' Funny, my sister Doris when telling the story says it was her who spoke to the two Nazis and she can't even remember me being there. By the same token I don't remember that she was present. May be we both colored our memories a bit." Again I took a moment and stayed with my reflections. I refused the chocolate cake Miriam offered to share with me and spoke once more.

"Her husband was released from Dachau after a while, as were many of those who had been rounded up during the *Kristallnacht* raids. As you know, it was a year before the war in Europe



started and there was pressure from foreign countries. Of course once the war started Germany did not give a damn about foreign public opinion.

After I had left with Walter for Belgium my aunt, her husband, Ruthie, and the new baby girl, Simmele booked passage on a German ship and headed toward Palestine. It was legal thus far. Emigration was permitted, nay, encouraged by the Nazis before the war. They just did not allow us to take any money or valuables. Let's get rid of the dirty Jews but keep their property, was their battle cry. The real problem was to find a country that would take us in."

I stopped speaking and took a bite from my, just served, sandwich and washed it down with a swallow of tea. I looked around the little outdoor café wondering how everything could be so normal when I was filled with such sadness.

I resumed my tale while Miriam struggled to eat her lunch. My words were not soothing dinner music. "When they arrived in Haifa the British who occupied Palestine would not let them disembark. My Uncle Joseph, who was married to mother's sister Regina, tried everything to persuade them, reasoning, begging, bribing, but it was of no avail. He did business with the British and in the past he had always been able to bargain for what he wanted. Not so now! The ship was stranded for a long time in the harbor. For days on end the family looked down on the Holy Land, their only hope of refuge, and could not set foot on its soil. Imagine the scene, a man who had suffered several months of Dachau tortured, distraught, fighting to save his family looking down on his relatives below. There stood my sister Marianne tanned from work on her Kibbutz, my Uncle Joseph Bruckel, and his oldest daughter Gertrude, Uncle Simon (Siegfried) and his wife and his older children waving up to them—calling to them. They on the deck were in stark contrast to their robust, healthy but sad and anxious relatives. Their states were diametrically opposed, one side had water, food, a home, freedom, and the other had none of those basic human





needs. They, on the deck faced not only continued physical discomfort but also the dread of being delivered into the hands of the Nazis, which was an ever-present threat.

My aunt Regina, Uncle Joseph's wife, was not told about her sister's plight. She suffered from depression as long as I can remember and after they fled Stuttgart and having left her parents and two sisters, my mother and Friedel, behind she had gotten much worse. Uncle Joseph feared for her sanity had she known or even suspected the fate that awaited her sister.

The British soldiers who guarded the ship of fear and travel-worn refugees would not even allow drinking water to be taken on board —not even for the children and babies. The authorities hoped that hunger and thirst would drive the captain to turn around and go elsewhere. There was no elsewhere. The Jewish agencies in every country tried to gain entry for the hapless souls. The ship finally had to leave Haifa. I do not know how many months the voyage to hell took. First there was at least a month or more, I think, in the harbor of Haifa and then came the seeking from land to land. Who knows how long they floated around until the ship with Friedel and family were delivered back to Germany with its occupants to be shipped to the ovens.“

Until then I was telling the story almost in a monotone. It was more like reading a book. I had distanced myself from it. It was all I could do to get through relating this tragedy, this gross injustice, and this deliberate murder by the British. But now my voice broke and I started to sob.

Miriam gently touched my arm. Neither one of us cared about the people looking at us. Many knew who we were as pictures and stories of us, the former Jewish citizens of Stuttgart, appeared in the newspaper daily. The couple, who lives in South America, she from Stuttgart and he from another city in Germany, walked past but delicately did not disturb us. They nodded their heads and we acknowledged them.



Miriam paid the bill and still silently crying I followed her out of the restaurant. We did not speak much. I indicated that I wanted to go to see Mr. Fern and she walked me to the synagogue and went back to the hotel to rest.

Arno Fern was very kind and helpful. It took quite a bit of effort and research until we found out where *Maly Trostinec* was. It was a horrific killing field fourteen kilometers from Minsk. While there was a Ghetto for the local Jews in Minsk the Jews that came from the German *Reich* were isolated from their Russian brethren. It is stated in the book, *Gedenkbuch, Opfer der Verfolgung der Juden...* that the Jews that came from *Teresienstadt* in the summer of 1942 were immediately gassed. Many were murdered right in the boxcars. Grandfather must have been among them as the dates concurred.

Despite the sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach I pushed on. We had almost given up when someone in the office remembered another source, a third book. And there they were Friedel, her husband and children. They had been interned in a camp named *Zamosc* near Lublin, which had been started, as a slave labor facility. It also had a women's division. The conditions there were dreadful and those who did not die from exhaustion, hunger, and disease were shipped to an annihilation camp. Next to their four names and birth dates it read: "*verschollen*."

I do not believe that there is a more chilling word to describe the fate of a human being. *Verschollen* means that someone disappeared without a trace as if they had never existed. It means everything about them was annihilated including any knowledge about place or time. It was as if they never had lived.

I went to the hotel and told Miriam of my findings. After we rested a bit we knew we had to get out and find people and a light atmosphere. We called Petra and went for dinner with her. She spoke of her country home in Austria and what she and her brother did there as children. I too



told anecdotes from my childhood while digging into my grilled chicken. I was hungry since I had little to eat at lunch.

I began to chuckle and related the legend of the round table.

” My two *Lausbuben* brothers... “

“What does *Lausbauben* --did I pronounce it right? Anyway, what does it mean?” said Miriam. Petra and I laughed and I explained:

“ *Lausbuben* means mischief makers, and they were that. You know what those rascals did? They used to take our heavy, round library table -- I don’t know how they had the strength to move that huge piece of oak. They were still pretty small. The table was on a center pedestal, not on legs. Well, they turned it over on its side and rolled it through the room. They made puffing and hooting noises and called it their *Dampfwalze*. It really did make a pretty good steamroller. Oma or Opa would come running upstairs because they thought the ceiling was falling down. You have to remember this scene took place in the formal *Herrenzimmer*, our salon, and the table was a very valuable piece.”

We all laughed now and the heavy atmosphere from earlier was dispelled for the moment. Petra asked how we liked the opera to which our city-hosts had taken us last night. “The *Rosenkavalier* is quite humorous,” I said “but a bit tedious.” For a few moments we talked about our evening on the town. In parting Petra invited us to drive us to the *Bobser*. The *Bobser* are the woods above the city to which father took us many Sundays for an outing.





## Chapter 7

### Stop! Be Brave.

The next few days were filled with activity. For comic relief we were treated to a very funny variety show. There was yet another outing to the country. We visited a famous castle. It stands on a mountain and can be seen from the highway. It is not very far from Stuttgart. *Hohenzollern* is very large and ornate to the point of being obscene. The huge ballroom size rooms were bedecked with such opulence that it stunned the senses. Richly inlaid wood, gold decorating everything from furniture to walls, hand-painted ceilings, bejeweled decanters, immense silver carved candlesticks were but a mere representation.

I vacillated between bemusement, boredom, and anger. Bemused, because I did not know how else to react to our guide, a bustling lady approaching middle age who had told us in her heavily accented English: “On the way to the castle I will show you how we rebuilt Stuttgart after the war. You will be very proud!” This remark was so inappropriate that I laughed and under my breath I murmured: “I wished I could have seen it in ruins.”

Once we were in the castle the lady who had made the bizarre statement almost salivated when she described the splendor in the minutest details along with the boring history of the district and the personal stories of its titled inhabitants. She also told us of the difficulty the serfs had in building the castle and at what cost. Stones had to be dragged up the mountain and that took many laborers. She bragged on and on how much wealth in the form of art, precious metals, craftsmanship, and such went into the creation of this palace. I overheard one of the American women say to her husband in Yiddish: “I wonder how many serfs had to starve and work themselves to death...” I looked at her and nodded sadly. That is when I became angry at the unfairness of things. I got out of the dungeon-like castle as soon as I could and walked the grounds. Let



those who are interested wallow in the patriotic lecture tour. The sunshine and greenery helped shelf my frustration.

Toward the end of our stay we had several days without scheduled activities. On one of them Miriam and I decided to take the train to Freudenstadt in the Black Forest. We walked down to the main train station. Like most of Stuttgart, the *Bahnhof* too, was rebuilt. It non-the-less was familiar enough to evoke strong memories. It had been from there that my brother Walter and I fled to Belgium in the late spring of 39. It was there where we said good-bye to mother, father, Doris, and my youngest sibling Bernie and it was from there that we entered our refugee years without knowing whether we would ever see our family again. Despite this trauma of my leaving my home forever, it was my sister Marianne's departure in March 38 that had the greater impact on me. Maybe because it was the first tangible shock. A true predictor of things to come. The years from 1933 had evoked an ever-mounting fear that was stalking me like a constant shadow. There had been many incidents that endangered my family's life and my well being. Such as being yanked out of school and only allowed to attend a quickly improvised Jewish one, constant fear of being spied on, the dread of being at the mercy of your neighbors who could denounce you despite your innocence. Yet it was my sister's emigration that made concrete the nebulous threat under which I had lived. And, this even prior to our grandparents and uncles deportation *The Night of the Broken Glass*.

I can still see myself running alongside the train as it pulled out of the station and I can still smell the smoke as the engine puffed. The hooting and clanging noise that announced its departure carved itself in my memory. Sobbing I accompanied her, the sister with whom I had a special bond despite our six- year age difference. As fast as my twelve-year-old legs could carry me I sped. I was unwilling to stop and when the platform ended I started to run onto the rails that





snaked parallel to the ones on which her car was moving. Marianne called to me: "Stop, be brave, *Chalutz*, until we meet again."

I let her go then and my white handkerchief seemed to wave until forever as I thought of the many times I was allowed to accompany her to her *Hachshara* excursions. These preparations for life in Palestine had Marianne digging dirt in her effort to learn agriculture instead of dissecting a cadaver. Her earlier choice had been to become a doctor. Once when on a long, hot hike each person was given a canteen of water. We drank eagerly until we were ordered to spill out the remnants of our flasks. At that point we were only half way into our climb. It was to teach us self-discipline. Water was scarce in the hot desert to which these *Chalutzim*, and maybe I, too, some day, were going. She had called me a *Chalutz*, pioneer, and I too summoned the self-discipline she called for and I stopped crying but my longing for both her and the land she was to free, burned like a fever.

By the time Miriam and I arrived in Freudenstadt two hours later a cool drizzle greeted us. I wore only a thin summer dress and I was cold. Since we had no idea about buses and such we asked directions to the hub of this resort town. We were told it was quite a walk. Not put off, we set out up the hill. On and on we climbed for an hour. It was worth it. Not only did I feel warmer but also the town is charming. Albeit it is much larger and more commercial than when we had visited there during my childhood. I remember only unpaved roads and horse drawn carriages except for our Mercedes in which our chauffeur had driven us up. I am sure there were other cars but not many. The mode of travel besides on-foot or bicycle definitely was mostly by our four-legged friends judging by the smelly evidence in the road. Cows too were generous contributors of the mushy carpet as they trotted fro and to their stables. We used to rent an alpine cottage for the summer. Up the road was a kosher hotel and my grandparents often had stayed there. Except



for breakfast and a light supper we children, held in tow by our governess, ate our hot meal at the hotel too. My parents came for most weekends and then would be told about all our naughtiness.

Miriam and I crossed the busy square and then navigated ourselves through a hectic intersection with cars converging from different directions. Our goal was the little train that stopped in front of a nearby church. It ran every half-hour and was to take us through the dense forest. Famous landmark homes and resort hotels were part of the itinerary. When we passed the first hotel I laughed and said: "Wow, this luxury pad is a far cry from the two story walk-up lodgings in which my grandparents stayed whenever they did not go to that other little resort village we visited a few days ago."

It was hard to recapture the warmth and innocence of this town. Especially so when the man behind me started to tell me that he had been a prisoner of war under the Americans. He raved how good and plentiful his food was. He had overheard us speaking English and knew that I was a Jew who had been born in Germany. Trying to impress me in the style of, *my best friends are Jews*, he continued: "I was wounded and a Jewish army doctor operated on me. I was scared that he would hold it against me that I was German but he was fantastic, very professional. I got the same treatment as the American wounded. He became my friend. I was lucky not to have been caught by the Russians or the French. The English were not good either."

I sighed and thought about the woman on the train to Freudenstadt. She was expensively and stylishly dressed. Her whole appearance announced that she was wealthy. She spoke of her husband who was in a sanitarium in the next town after the Freudenstadt stop. He has cancer and she visits him every week. He too had been a prisoner of war but with the French. She bitterly complained that his food rations were skimpy and that the treatment was not good. How much better



it would have been had he been captured by the Americans. She went on to say that she too did not have much food either. I interrupted her tale of self-pity and asked her if she would have preferred the fare in concentration camps.

Just as I had halted her whining I terminated the old, German army veteran's efforts to make an ally of me. I smiled politely and moved to another seat. Then I turned my attention to the scenery through which the little train was puffing. Miriam followed and sat next to me. While so much of Freudenstadt was totally different the pine trees had not changed. The air was permeated with their vibrant odor and made me recall an incident from long ago.

I had always hated *Wirsing*, a spinach type vegetable, but I had to eat it because, as I was told by Mother, it was good for me. I was very ingenious and invented many ways to escape my fate. A convincing, but pretend, stomachache often worked. Another ploy was to run to Papa and plead with him to step in for me. There was little he could refuse me. I had my pouting and other such wiles down pat. All that changed when my youngest brother's children-nurse Lena came on the scene. One year she, instead of a governess, took care of us older children too. She was Jewish and since the Baron Rothschild family had employed her for many years my mother trusted the nurse's child rearing methods without knowing too much about them. Nurse Lena was tough. One of her approaches to my refusing to eat, not only *Wirsing* but also most foods except chocolate was to hold my nose until I choked. When I was forced to open my mouth in order to breathe she would shove a spoon full of food in and repeated the procedure until she thought I had enough nourishment. Wow was me if I spit it out and wow was me if I told Papa about it. One day I managed to dodge her and ran out of the house. I walked quickly towards the woods. Because walking was the main recreation aside from the mineral baths in this resort there were wide, well maintained paths through the forest. My feet sank into the thick layer of pine needles that paved the ground, The twittering of birds accompanied me, and I felt like the fairy-tale,





Gretchen, as I skipped along. The tall trees sheltered me and I felt cozy and safe. Soon I forgot all about the wicked nurse and the fact that I was actually running away. It simply felt good to be walking and not being told what to do. After a few hours I grew very tired and even a poor eater like I was, got hungry sometimes. Also, I felt I had punished Nurse Lena enough. She was bound to be worried. I was ready to go back. But how was I to do that? I could not find the way. Every path looked the same. I would run along one convinced I was on the right track only to penetrate deeper and deeper into the woods. Exhausted I lay down on the pine-needle blanket and promptly fell asleep. Several neighbors had been alerted and one of them found me after an intensive search. There was no fall-out from the episode, as Nurse Lena wanted the whole situation to disappear lest her feeding method would be revealed. She suspected, rightly, that Mother would not agree with her style and since she was responsible for me, my being lost was truly not to her credit.

This was not the only time I got the upper hand. Every morning we children were given a huge slice of dark bread. The local baker baked it daily. In my memory the large loaf looms almost as big as a wheel. Thick butter, cheese, or jam and sometimes a boiled egg washed down with cup or two of cocoa did not seem like a large breakfast to my siblings. However I could barely manage a bite of the whole-wheat staple and did not touch the other food. I nibbled and nibbled but I could not swallow. The others went out to play or were taken on outings by Nurse but I was locked in the room until I had eaten up—at least the bread.

When a reasonable time had passed I would call out: “Finished!” I then was let out of my jail to the tune of Nurse’s satisfied smile on her face. A smile that seemed to say, I know how to get her to obey. Then on a cool day toward the end of the summer the housekeeper who came in every second day to clean, wash and iron, tried to make a fire in the rotund pot bellied stove. Can you imagine her surprise when she found all my daily-uneaten slices I had so cleverly disposed of?



After the little train ride we walked through the Cultural Center which also contained a magnificent large ballroom, restaurant and theatre. The baths were in the area too and while rain drenched it was nice to walk through the adjacent park. We stopped in a café. An unpleasant experience between the noise, the turtle-tempo service that took half-hour to produce a cup of tea and the ridiculous price. Thirty dollars, even for expensive 1998 Germany, is exorbitant for tea and cake for two. They did not even provide us a napkin. The flea market in the square near by made up for it. I found a small doll with a porcelain face in perfect condition for one dollar. But the best of all was the array of carpet beaters. It was going to be a present for my brother's seventieth birthday. I chose an antique one. I planned to give him the gift along with a poem a month hence at a family celebration. After I had bargained for my treasure and got it for three Marks, about the same amount in Canadian dollars, I told Miriam what it was all about.

"Walter, the brother who lives in Israel will be in N.Y. and his children are giving a party. Actually it is more like a family get together. He was impossible as a child. There was one governess who with the aid of the strong, young maid often locked Walter in the cellar. This punishment did not keep him from breaking more furniture, hitting our little brother or me-- especially me, at the next opportunity. If Grandma were aware that he was disciplined thusly she would immediately come to his rescue. No one was going to hurt her boy. Her prince, the first boy after three girls of which I was the youngest, could do no wrong. Out of the cellar he came and to the chagrin of every one he would be eating cake and drinking hot chocolate instead of howling in the dank, dark terrain."

Miriam chuckled.

At this point I too began to snicker and went on "Like all of us children Mother gave birth to Walter at home with the help of a midwife. The second that Grandma saw it was a boy she ran



into the street and ran up and down in front of our house yelling: 'It's a *Jingele*, it's a boy.' Pins that had held the neat knot had fallen out in her enthusiastic sprint. Her red hair was streaming down her back and flying wildly in the wind. Her arms were waving like a conductor's in the throws of Tchaikovsky's 1812. You have to picture it, we did not live in a Ghetto but on an elegant orderly German street and here she was running around and screaming in Yiddish."

Miriam was now laughing uproariously and stammered: "What a scene. But tell me what has all that to do with the carpet beater?"

I answered: "Besides the cellar there was also the carpet beater. Despite the fact that I was Walter's punching bag and welcomed him being punished I still cringe in empathy when I remember the maid lifting him in her coarse, large-muscled arms and putting him face down over a chair. Then the round wicker disk attached to a long handle would descend. The air whistled through the porous weaves and hissed until the flat surface made contact and danced on Walter's naked *tush*. I never really knew whether he howled because he was humiliated or because of his sore buttocks."

By now we were really hungry and found a restaurant. It had taken a bit of doing especially since we wanted a hot meal. It was already 3:30 PM and as such late for lunch and early for dinner. We slid into our seats with a sigh. Hot soup with thick dark bread reminiscent of the one I used to feed the unlit stove bought us a measure of creature comfort. I yawned and was happy to be in this warm tavern which was empty but for us. We were told it would take quite a while to prepare and this did not bother us. Miriam looked at me and quietly said:

"You know Ruth, I never heard the story of how you actually escaped? I know that all of you went into England with the *Kindertransport* but that Doris and your youngest brother traveled





directly from Stuttgart while you went ahead to Belgium. Why didn't you all go together straight to the U.S.? I also know that Marianne went to Palestine in early 1938. Didn't she marry just before she left Stuttgart? "

She must have responded to my quick intake of breath because her hands flew to her mouth and she uttered: "Don't, if it is too painful. Maybe another time."

"It's ok. I'm touched that you continue to be so interested when you already have been part of so much intensity in the last few days. Let's see how far I get before the food comes or before we both get inundated."

"Yes, Marianne was married to Robert in our home before she and her new husband immigrated to Palestine. She was very young and idealistic. I think she was 17. They joined a *Kibbutz*. That was where their daughter Chaja was born a year later-- Chaja our lifeline. The rest of us were still in Germany and she became the symbol that no matter what was to come, Hitler could not destroy our whole family."

I stopped speaking and allowed my mind to trace Chaja's life, as I knew it through the pictures, letters and many visits. She was a chubby *Sabra* baby with dark eyes and a penetrating look. The 11-year-old slimming down and already revealing a smoldering ethnic beauty with a touch of a young Elizabeth Taylor. When she began to dance it was a family fact that she was taking after me. After her compulsory army duty she went on to a career in dance-education that blossomed into her being in charge of the dance programs for a chain of Kibbutzim. Her marriage and motherhood all flashed before my eyes.

I sighed and wiped away tears. I looked at my friend and sobbed.



Miriam said: "You are thinking of that Rosh Hashana when you got the call. You never spoke much about it."

" Oh Miriam, I just couldn't speak about it. Who would have thought she would die so young before all of us of the older generation who had survived all we did. She looked like 35 but was 54 and a picture of health. It was so sudden. After feeling tired and listless for a while she went to the doctor and within one to two weeks of diagnosis she was dead from Galloping Leukemia."

There seemed to be nothing that Miriam could say. I appreciated her silence and the gentle expression of sympathy on her face. The waiter approached with our main course and we were glad for the diversion and concentrated on our food.

After a while I put my fork down and said: " Iam ready to go on. Can you take in any more?"

She nodded.

I cleared my throat and my voice sounded to my ears as if it were coming from far away.

"There was an opportunity to go to Chile and Mother applied. All except Papa were anxious to leave. We were afraid."

A shudder passed through me and I continued,

"Oh, we were so afraid. Bad things were happening around us. Jewish friends being beaten up for nothing. There was no kosher meat or poultry. The modern dance school where I had been



taking classes had been forcibly closed because of its Jewish owner. We were spit on, called names and tormented in every way possible. People being arrested for nothing more than their religion under drummed up charges was an every day event. *KZ* which stood for concentration camp was a synonym for Dachau in those days and conjured up paralyzing dread with images of torture real and imagined that is still with me to this day. Just when we thought we could leave for South America our escape was blocked. There had been a way to exchange our house with a German National who lived in Chile and wanted to return to the Fatherland. I have a feeling that we also had to turn over our business and money along with the house to the patriotic returnee. I think it was the Nazis that put a stop to this transaction and not the Chilean government but I am not sure of this. I guess they thought they could get our property anyway. It was then when Mother simply overrode Father's denial. All along he chose to think that the Germans would never allow this situation to go on and all would be well soon. Not so our mother. She was sure that it was getting even worse for us Jews, also that war was coming. Despite his protest she registered all of us with the United States Consulate, which was in Stuttgart. Unfortunately only we children could get on the German quota because we were born in Germany. My parents had to be on the Polish quota system and that was very slow. Since we could not go alone we were in for a long wait. Still defying Papa Mutti also signed up all of us with the *Kindertransport*. There only was one application per family and therefore all four of us went on one document."

I stopped speaking for a moment and took a sip of tea to recover from my long monologue and to give my listener a breathing spell.

"Miriam, you do know what the *Kindertransport* was?"

"Not really. I know that it brought children to England. How did it work?"





“In the eleventh hour the British started this program to rescue 10,000 children from the claws of their would be murderers. They received visas and were to be housed with families or in quickly established hostels. The full quota was not reached by the time Hitler marched into Poland September 1, 1939 and Britain declared war with Germany two days later. As it was we didn’t get to England until late July or maybe it was August. But I am getting ahead of myself. We had a third cousin from my mother’s side in Belgium. They were quite poor but were willing to take two children. Mother felt as long as she could get any of us out she would take that chance. She was going to worry later how to connect us with the *Kindertransport* if that came to pass. Of course the British officials were not to be told that we were out of Germany. I have often asked why Walter and I and not the other two.”

“Sophie’s choice, what a woman!” Miriam exclaimed.

“Yes, that’s what she was, my beautiful mother.”

I continued to speak: “Recently Doris told me that Mother reasoned that she would keep the eldest and the youngest with her. Maybe Doris being older could be of help to her and Bernie was only seven was too young to be away from Mother. So barely 13-year-old me, clutching my brother’s hand we went by train to Antwerp. The stay in Belgium was pretty gruesome emotionally speaking.”

At this point three men came in and sat down at the bar in the rear of the restaurant. It broke the mood and we asked for the bill and walked out into the late afternoon sun that had broken through the clouds. We slowly descended the hill to the railroad station. By the time we arrived it started to drizzle again and once more we were cold. We did not get back to my interrupted account of my flight into England until we were snugly on the train.



“Where was I?”

“You just said that Belgium was difficult.”

“It sure was. Almost as bad as the orphan type life I later led in London. Actually though, England was worse because of the bombing. You know that I was injured during an air raid?... You know, actually I would rather talk about what you asked me earlier.”

“That’s fine, I’m here for you.”

I glanced at her and answered her smile likewise.

“Let me see. After Walter and I left the pressure on my father was heating up. The authorities went after our property. I think they’d already had stolen our department store.”

“What do you mean stolen.”

“Something like being told Jews can’t own business and given a *Pfenig* for the value of 100 *Marks* if that. Actually Mother signed our wholesale business over under the threats of imprisonment. She thought it high time to get Dad out of the country. He’d already had one heart attack right after *Kristallnacht*. How brave she was. Dad went on a business trip in May 1939 to visit his nephew. Gustav had fled with his German Christian wife Kitty and two children from Leipzig several years earlier—possibly as early as 1934. Dad simply stayed in England prepared to wait it out or for his U.S. visa to come through. This left Mutti with Doris and Bernie.”

“Did he live with your Dad’s nephew, that makes him your cousin, doesn’t it?”



“Yes he was my much older cousin.”

“Why couldn’t you stay with them when you got there instead of in a hostel?” Miriam asked.

“Good question. She did not want us nor Dad for that matter. She was a real bitch. A very pretty woman with a brother joined the German *Luftwaffe*.”

“*Luftwaffe*?”

“German airforce. Wonder if he was one of the pilots that bombed the hell out of London once the war started. Anyway to get back to what I started to tell you. Finally the Kindertransport papers came through and Walter and I took the train to *Ostend* on the river *Schelde* in Belgium. My brother told me that he always remembers that trip because of the incredible sunset as we were traveling west. We then took a ferry to Harwich. Walter was terribly seasick because we encountered a severe storm. We got to England before Doris and Bernie. They had embarked their ferry in Holland. However the storm was even worse for them and that is what delayed them. I think they had to sail the rough Northsea for a greater distance than we did. Walter and I traveled along the coast-line on the *Schelde* for a stretch before we entered the open sea. I remember almost nothing of the whole trip but I do recall the horrible fear when they would not let us get off the boat in England. We had no papers. The visas were with Doris. We actually were illegal as it was assumed that all four Feldman children were on board the ferry from Holland. Can you imagine Miriam; they were going to send us back! Where to? We had no papers to get back to Belgium.”

“Wow,” said Miriam.





At this point I got up and went to the toilet. Before I returned to my seat I walked up and down for a few minutes. I needed to move to rid myself of the tension that had been building. Miriam looked up and I could tell that she really wanted to know the outcome. I took a deep breath and went on.

“ Papa and Gustav did not come to the boat because they didn’t want the authorities who were responsible for placing us children to know we had relatives. Remember that Kitty did not want to take us and Dad himself lived with them. So here we were stranded. The captain needed to be ready for the return trip and wanted us gone. We pleaded and cried, both Walter and I. Just in the nick of time the other boat came in. There was a lot of commotion and one of the adults who traveled with the children on the other boat and who was from a Jewish agency managed to divert attention. Walter recently told me that someone in the British immigration closed an eye and he and I quickly got off and mingled with the other children. We found our sister and brother and each was duly tagged with a number written on a crude cardboard that hung around the neck.”

Feelings of abandonment, fear, homesickness were but a few of the many emotions that beset me once I was back in my hotel room in Stuttgart. Sleep escaped me and I finally got up’ pulled out my diary where the beginnings of a book was formulating.

Letter to my sister:

Mannelle, my sister you say, ‘Be strong *Chalutz*,’ and with this bidding you leave me. My eyes blinded by tears I hold your hand through the window of the train that is to carry you from the *Eretz* of your birth to the *Eretz* of hope. The land that you are leaving behind is engulfed in Satan’s lust unleashed and the ancient land that you are approaching is spread before you in biblical prediction for you to toil into lush fields of milk and honey.



The locomotive engine accelerates and you are whisked past me and out of reach. I stare out over the long line of steel rails that stretch before me. They still echo with the rhythmic clatter of the wheels and become my heart's silent cry. Take me with you! Will I ever see you again?

We now begin our separate journeys. Two sisters close despite the seven years that span our ages. Your road takes you through water-starved terrain filled with scorpions and yellow fever. You learn to cope with the harshness of the *Kibbutz* after a life of pampered princess. A princess too sensitive to sleep on a bed that harbors a single pea despite thick mattresses that shield her from the little lump. Now your cot is a berth of guns onto which you wearily sink. You close your eyes in momentary rest while another *Chaver* guards the commune. You marry and bear children and still we are apart.

My path winds through our mother's tears as her parents and brother are banned from their home and shipped like unwanted parcels to Poland, their birthplace. There too they are not wanted and left to linger in no man's land, a narrow stretch of hostile ground. On I stumble through broken glass and burning synagogues of *Kristallnacht* in '38. You are spared that night of rampant hatred and the carting off of family and friends to cemeteries or to the tomb called Dachau. There is still contact with you. The occasional letter reaches us in Stuttgart. The news of the birth of your daughter Chaya in late 1938, six months before I too manage to leave, gives us courage. At least if we don't make it our family lives on.

I traverse through pain of exile. Belgium, a boot-camp that spins into chaos childhood teachings of good and evil. We were tolerated because much money was paid to the neutral country for our acceptance. What was I to make of my host-country that turns back refugees who try to cross the border from the Nazi demon-kingdom to possible freedom? She does not leave me day or night the mother running with a bullet in her back. Her baby alive as she drops to the ground. With the



last breath, a maternal strength, she pivots and falls on her side not to crush her child. Who shot her as she ran the line of demarcation? The German or the Belgium guard? It must be the latter as she was found meters upon meters into his land.

Belgium relatives try to be kind but are people of another ilk. Our cousin's Sam American Jewish wife knows that I come from a strictly kosher home. Yet she urges and tries to bribe me to eat shrimp off Antwerp's traditional street-pushcart. I repeatedly refuse. Terrified to eat *tref* food and thus I bring God's wrath upon me in the form of parents sent to concentration camp back there in man-made hell. 'Is it kosher?' I ask with suspicion when urged to eat the chicken salad offered me. 'Of course what do you think,' she answers me. Oh, that cruel raspy laughter that accompanied her triumph over a helpless victim. She had tricked me! Anxiously I beg forgiveness in my evening prayer for eating shrimp. Somehow I feel I will be forgiven, but what about my corroding trust in human beings?

I think of you constantly, my sister, my role model. In the refugee home in London my anxiety reaches a peak and I bang my head against the tiled wall of the bathroom. Behind the locked door I scream with my hand stuffed into my mouth, '*Mutti, Manne, Mutti, Manne.*' You cannot hear me; you are so far away. Nor can our mother respond from behind the wall of war.

After I settle in New York, correspondence between us is more frequent even throughout the last years of World War 2. I still carry the picture in my mind of you dressed in your elegant herringbone print coat that skims your slender body and a small hat pulled dashingly sideways over your marcelled coif. That is before you became a *Chalutz*. After that you exchange chic for more practical clothes. The herringbone coat picture is one of the last photos taken before you leave Germany. Somehow when I speak with you in the silence of my heart I see you as you are then and the photos you send of yourself throughout the years don't seem real. Is it the same for you?





What do you think of my wedding pictures? Yes that is your youngest sister all grown up. She has become quite a long-legged glamour puss, don't you think?

By the time my daughter Jackie is born you are married to Shlomoh and Chaya the daughter has a brother some ten years her junior. Timnah follows Michah a few years later. With your two adopted-*Kibbutz* daughters Sarah and Esther, your family is complete.

Finally my longing is stilled and I find myself on a boat from Marseilles to Haifa. Emile and Jackie are with me. She is 8-years-old this summer of 1960. It is a comfort to have my husband and daughter alongside. With the joy and anticipation of reuniting with my sister after 22 years also comes anxiety. Has the journey through wars, night attacks on the *Kibbutz*, anxiety for your husband and son on the front made you tough like a *Sabra*-- the fruit that is tough on the outside but soft of heart? Or has it dulled your spirit and worse yet have you become vengeful? What about the strong sister tie that had been between us? Have the long separation and our individual monumental experiences drowned out our love?

Once I am in your arms on the dock the questions are answered. "You and I always had a special bond," Marianne, my sister whispers.

Tears flow and this time she does not say to me or to herself: "Be strong *Chalutz*!"

I stop writing and give myself the same license now sitting in the small hotel room. My tears flow. With each sob another memory that rips at my heart is washed clean from personal contamination and rendered into *zachor*, remembrance in God. True knowing no longer allows the devastation of my wounded self. Bitterness and hatred transform into light -- eternal candle that burns in the caverns of my soul. The newfound love no whitewashing emotion or romantic no-



tion but strength of purified feelings and thought. This *zachor* a constant vigil for memory must not be lost. With heart and head in tandem I once more become the writer to record what must be told. Constant practice of cleansed remembrance, the real *zachor*; a daily task takes this form and tonight forsakes refuge in sleep.

And, so I continue to distill my personal memory of my story of pathos and sorrow in war torn England. A pale skinny girl stares back at me. One among many faces with bewildered eyes who have numbers instead of names. Britain alone of all the nations rescued a handful of us from the caverns of flesh-burning ovens. Yet, the same country that saved us had locked its gates to our parents sealing our orphan fate. The same nation that refused entry to my aunt Friedel and her family into Palestine and sent them back to their flaming death. While in a refugee hostel or in a foster home our anguish stalked us through dark long nights, the pillows stifling our screams. Some matrons, foster parents and foster siblings were kind and giving, others cruel and hard. The luck of the draw made a huge difference but only on one level. The severance from our families was a gnawing, empty hole that nothing could fill. Yet, the pain from this hunger did not begin to compare to the dread as we tried to imagine what was happening to them back there in Satan's land.

Then a month after arriving at the hostel I took very ill with severe strep throat and extremely high fever. Several days into my illness on September 1, 1939 my isolation reached its peak. In a tiny windowless room on the third floor far away from where I could infect other children, I heard muffled cries of "Germany! Poland! War!" Because I was contagious no one could come to visit me. The cook would enter her nose and face covered and bring me food and medicine. In the past, mother had always been there when the horrid pain in my, all too often, abscessed throat became too much. Alone now in the cell that was my sickroom I was left to morbid imagination. What would happen to her? Would I ever see her again? War! What did it mean? My brothers



were in a hostel in Margate on the coast. Would bomb carrying *Messerschmidts*, once they crossed the Channel drop their devastating cargo on this pretty coastal town? It was days before I was allowed back to my dormitory and join the others. They too feared for their parents who had chosen to save their children but now were totally cut off behind the enemy line. We were plunged into a screaming silence. Many children had fathers who had suffered Dachau while they were still at home in Germany. How much worse the chances now that the Nazis could carry out their gruesome deed in secrete behind the wall of war? How many more *Dachaus* in ascending order of Nazi-evil were there now? The imagination painted shapes of random horrors. Nightmares were fired by the ultimate fear. Would the parents still be alive at the end of the tunnel of this terror-time? Yes, we still dared to dream that there would be an end and the world would right the wrong. What blessed naivete fed my courage? We were young and faith, while fragile, was not yet totally annihilated.

Often I wished the night-Luftwaffe-strikes would not let me witness the new morn. Carefully I locked the bathroom door so as not to be found out by the matron of our refugee home, the glorified orphanage. Sobbing I cried out my mother's name as if my intensity alone could rescue her from the hell that trapped her behind enemy lines. I bit my arm, as that was a lesser agony than the one that choked my heart.

The foster father in Stotfold, a village an hour from London to where we had been evacuated for several months, muttered 'you can't be Jews. You look like other children-- the priest told me they have horns.' I watch rows of hapless German Jewish refugee men file out of the government building to which Father and my sister who was now 16 had been summoned. They were to establish our status and because our quota number for the United States was about to come up my father and Doris were not deemed enemy aliens. The files of men were to be transported to the Isle of Man and there interned. The destination of other hapless refugees was far away-- Canada







and Australia. The very government that had given them refuge for the crime of fleeing their common enemy imprisoned them! Several of them gave us pieces of paper and asked us to call their families, as they were not given a chance to go home. Oh Britannia, Britannia rules the waves.

And, still I was fortunate, so I was told by all but Anna Freud. She, the daughter of the revolutionary psychiatrist and a psychologist in her own right, found that the Kindertransport children were often severely psychologically damaged. More so than those who survived the tortures at the hands of the Nazi beasts alongside of their parents.

My scars had no knowable shape or form. My anger and hatred had no constant target. Ten years after the war in melting pot New York my psychiatrist prodded me to dig into my psyche for the feelings of deeply buried blame. Why did Mutti send me away, sobbed the arrested inner child in adult body? Then stricken with remorse for questioning the one who had sacrificed herself to save my life imprisoned me in hatred for myself. Nothing was tangible. I did not see death but only knew that all whom I loved disappeared into thick fog. My imagination chiseled into my skull its own versions of hurling bodies and howling dogs in pursuit of sprinting legs. My heart stored the anxiety of sudden and irrevocable separations to haunt me throughout my life. I warned myself, don't come too close to love for it may evaporate in nameless smoke and yet I was glad to have been given the choice to suffer love's consequence.

Yes, I was thankful that the British saved my life and then I hid my face in survivor's guilt. I shut out further painful memories and allow great empathy to flow to the sad pale faces with bewildered eyes captured on the screen of my mind. My tears stream as I write these words and whisper to the 10,000 children, "I am grateful that you are alive. I am grateful that I am alive."



It is right now to put away pen and started book and get some sleep before the next day when Petra was to take Miriam and me to the Bobser Woods.

It was sunny and cozily warm without being humid and hot. As the car mounted the hills of Stuttgart the surroundings became familiar. We came to the spot where a girlfriend and I had paraded in our new *Rosh Hashanah*, New Year, holiday clothes. We thought we were the cat's whiskers. I recall wearing one of my two Russian tunic dresses, the navy one with a hand embroidered bib and high neck, and over it I had slung a very fine grey herringbone chesterfield. Of course the whole purpose of the excursion was to prance around with our coats hung over the shoulders without slipping the arms through the sleeves. That to our twelve-year-old minds was truly daring and ultra sophisticated. We were sure every one who passed was admiring us. Looking back I think that this was simply wishful thinking on our part. Funny to have been such normal young girls-- *Kristallnacht* was less than a month in the future.

Petra, Miriam and I walked through the forest for a long time. At one point I remembered a special afternoon with my father in these same woods where he often took us for our Sunday outing. I shared it with the two women.

"One day I was strolling through these woods with Papa. I can almost feel my hand in his large warm one," I mused. For a moment I stopped and the others, too, were quiet. I went on: "Two men were walking toward us. They were dressed in well-tailored white wool pants, white shirts and navy blazers with emblems on the breast pockets. Father later explained that these insignias identified the country and sport team for which these apparent competitors were playing. As the men came closer I suddenly clapped my hands and with wide-eyed wonder called out: "*Papa, schau, da ist ein Mohr!*" Father tried to shush my noisy comment. But I was so excited as I had never seen any one with such dark skin. My own family and all the people around me were very



light toned. In comparison one of the athlete's coloring was like shining ebony. There were no African natives living in Stuttgart then. It was only through storybooks and a Shirley Temple film that I was acquainted with such exotic parts of the world."

Petra said: "It sure is different now in Stuttgart. We have so many immigrants from the African continent." I could not tell if she shared the hostile feelings of her countrymen toward these immigrants. I sighed and entered the world of my fourteen-year-old bewildered self. I had arrived in New York just a few days ago and much was strange. The racial and ethnic diversity provided an exciting yet intimidating Joseph's-Robe--a tapestry of vibrant life. In comparison Europe seemed bland in its Caucasian whiteness.

Miriam and Petra stopped to examine a wildflower. I took the opportunity to walk over to a lookout. Stuttgart in its splendor nestled below. Somehow I was sad. My mood lightened as we made our way to the enchanting teahouse that had been there when I was a child. The gardens surrounding the rotund building with its glass exterior were scrumptious. Tall, green trees and colorful shrubs were the backdrops for brightly blooming flowerbeds. We walked down many steps to reach the car and realized how much we had walked and climbed. Miriam and I thanked Petra for the delightful afternoon, but we were somewhat subdued because we knew that we were to leave our new friend soon.





## Chapter 8

### Journey of a Thousand Miles....

An evening had been set aside for a festive farewell dinner. Before the gala night I needed to bid the city of my birth a personal good by. I walked all over town by myself. I passed by where our department store had stood and allowed my mind to wander through the toy department and lift the *Kate Krusse* doll off her stand and hug her. From there my imagination ran over to the chocolate counter just as I did in reality when I was a child. Tearing myself away from my memories I went along lower *Koenigstrasse* until I reached an immense square in front of the sprawling impressive castle. An old fashioned circular bandstand housed the musicians. They played a march and to my delight followed it by a waltz. Trying to shun the tantalizing cafés that edged the long pedestrian street I averted my eyes. I had sampled their scrumptious wares; especially the meringue hidden under mounds of whipped cream, on several occasions during this trip. This evening meal promised to be very calorie rich and I wanted to save myself. I took a sip from the water bottle I usually carry and hurried into the garden of the castle which was actually a huge park. I believe it is larger than Central Park in New York and the vegetation with its array of colors and textures is landscaped into a beauty that fits the climate and style of the city. While not the luscious *El Hambra* of sun-kissed Granada, which to me is the jewel among gardens of the world, it is definitely the *El Hambra* of Stuttgart. I had made up my mind that on the pilgrimage today I would dispel any painful memories were they to try to crowd in. I did not fully succeed. As I looked at the comfortable benches sitting on lush green grass I saw signs from the past posted. Inscribed on them was the warning Jews and dogs not allowed on benches and grass. Exhausted from hours of walking, yet more peaceful than I had been at any time on this trip, I went to the hotel to take a long nap before dressing for the evening.



The whole group arrived *en masse* at the hotel about seven. All were dressed in even greater splendor than for the opera. There were silks, florals, long, and short cocktail dresses. Miriam seemed to float in her soft beige gauze dress as we were ushered to a private dining area. The delicate pink flowers printed into the sheer fabric seemed to be dancing on their green stems. The skirt of her dress was full and the top had loose wing-like sleeves.

In the reception room we were served champagne and *hors d'oeuvre*. The ambience was one of sheer refinement. The décor was the definition of elegance. Our feet sank into the thick, soft carpet. When we entered the dining room there were many admiring exclamations. The walls were not plaster but made of intricate inlaid wood. I believe the panels of wood were from fruit trees since they were not dark like mahogany and had an almost gold shimmer. The long wall facing the entrance door was a series of ceiling to floor windows. It was early enough in the summer evening for the sun not to have gone down fully and in the distance lofty trees could be seen that appeared to wave their welcome. Sheer curtains covered the glass. Panels of soft drapery in periwinkle blue alternated with the same fabric in Rembrandt golden/brown to match the wood. They framed the white see-through gauze. Graceful, yet sturdy wood framed chairs were upholstered in the same blue. Large round tables with white, linen table clothes were placed around the lovely room. A single tall candle accentuated a centerpiece, with vibrant red, soft yellow flowers in a bed of lush greenery. The heavy silver plates and cutlery were complimented by exquisitely thin stemware. We were told that the sterling tableware and the bone china dishes, on which our food was about to be served, were replaced yearly at the occasion of the farewell dinner. In preparation of the dinner the rabbi koshered the pots that were to be used. Since the rabbi and several dignitaries from the Jewish community were present, the Jewish dietary laws were strictly adhered.



Once seated at our assigned table I found with joy that Arno Fern, the director of the Jewish Community Services, was at our table. So too was Miriam who sat next to Edgar Kulbe. Dr. Ursel Bucher, a physician, was seated adjacent to him. Her business card states that she is an advisor to the city government. She was very warm and spoke English perfectly. Every table had a city official and a representative from the Jewish Community seated with the guests. Miriam and I were delighted that every one who sat with us were people we really liked. There was the South American couple. Lore was wearing a dressy white blouse and dark taffeta skirt and her distinguished grey-haired husband wore a well-cut dark suit. Then there were Alice and her husband Al from Florida with whom we shared many enjoyable hours--and Margaret. I remember the first day I arrived. Standing at the front desk at the hotel, I noticed an attractive, slender woman about my age speaking with the concierge. She wore her straight dark blond hair pushed back with a narrow scarf-band. Something drew me to her. I detected a gentleness of spirit and manner. I wondered who she was? Just then a slim, young woman with long, dark curly hair crossed the lobby and spoke to this gentle woman in American English. I later learned that the older woman was Margaret of our group and indeed, she was just as fine as I thought her to be at first glance. She lives in Long Island, New York. Her daughter Laura, the younger one with large eyes sparkling from her attractive and interesting face, was someone whom I wanted to come to know better. That I did. She has an artistic soul. Her field is music and her husband is a filmmaker. We found a common bond not only because of our love of New York and its art world but also because of our respective daughters. We spent hours delving into our mother-hearts. Each one of us spoke a similar quality of love and concern for our daughters. Her Lina was only six at that time while mine was by then, a woman in her forties. Yet I still lived in the same pain that Laura was facing now. Her sensitive bright child had difficulties adjusting to changing situations. Her short attention span made the prospect of entering school the coming fall an anxious anticipation.







Laura had said to me that she would not be at the dinner, as she had to go home to New York after only a week's stay. She was torn between returning to her child and comforting her mother with her presence for the rest of the trip. Margaret was in deep grief over the recent death of her husband. While Laura too was mourning she stood in for her late father and accompanied her mother to Germany. Laura had never been away from her little girl and she worried a great deal about her. How well I had understood Laura's concern and told her so. "Laura, Jackie was 14 months when I was rushed to the hospital. I too had never been away from her over night nor for more than an hour or two during the day."

"That's rough, Ruth" she said. "She was so much younger than Lina. How long were you gone? Did your husband take care of her."

The memory of that profound afternoon a few days earlier when Laura and I were in *Muhabet*, (Arabic, which means a meeting of beings in divine love) was suddenly replaced with a more mundane love--a small plate of marinated mushrooms in savory herb strudel pastry. The delicate aroma besieged my nostrils and beguiled my taste buds. While I would have liked to reflect on my answer to Laura, I knew this was not the time or place. The memories that were stirred up during our visit with each other had to be put on hold. The festivities of the farewell dinner with all its social obligations forced themselves into the foreground. I smiled at Margaret in response to her words of praise of the appetizer. Silently I paid homage to those of us who were slain and in whose name I made this pilgrimage. Only then was I able to bite into the flaky crust.

The meal went ahead amid loud chatter. There were rampant table-hopping and picture snapping during the time the different courses were being served. The elegant thin bone china bowls in which the tomato soup with the fancy name of *Tomatenessenz mit Qaarknocken* had been presented were just being cleared away. After much coaxing to antidote her shyness Miriam went



off to take photos of all the guests seated at the different tables. She gently approached the rabbi, wanting not only a group picture but one of him alone. While there were others taking pictures the good rabbi directed his annoyance at her. "It is not polite to photograph some one while eating," he voiced. She must have been visibly crushed. Miriam told me later that one of the guests at the rabbi's table, who had in other situations displayed tact somewhat, softened the blow. The woman mused in a low voice but loud enough for the rabbi to hear, "It 's an art to be gracious." The rabbi apparently looked a bit embarrassed.

The three excellent Stuttgart regional wines were poured lavishly. While I do not drink alcohol my taste buds had a feast with the sole in lemon sauce. The vegetable strudel, potatoes, and carrots were as exotically prepared as their difficult German names implied *Laubkarotten* literally translated as praise-carrots. By the time the strawberries in chocolate jackets, the fine cookies and the coffee arrived the speeches began. Mayor Schuster's was welcoming and mercifully short. I had a hard time fighting my drowsiness during the rest the talks until my ears perked up. A strong yet gentle voice brought my wandering mind back.

"A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step." Already I liked Peter Honig from the Christian and Jewish Co-operation Association. He quoted the Chinese Lao-Tse and not a German heavy philosopher. He stated, "We present-day Stuttgarters stand before you embarrassed and timid because we do not know how we would have behaved had we lived in those times. Like Job's companions sat in silence beside him for seven days and seven nights because they saw his great suffering so we to day stand in silence beside you until you give us a sign that you are willing to speak to us. That you did." It was a short moving but unsentimental speech which ended with, "We are grateful for that first step. Bon Voyage, Shalom."



## Chapter 9

### Letting Go

Back at the hotel after getting ready for bed I sat quietly by the open window in the dark. A perfect night for prayer and reflection. The night before the day that was to be the most soul stirring of all the other poignant days of this trip. My daughter's face with the dancing deep, blue eyes and joyous grin that so identified her captivating features appeared in front of me. Again, as so many times on this trip I missed not having her with me. Yet I knew it was far better for her not to be exposed to the turbulence this journey called forth. Her nervous system could not withstand shocks since she never got over the trauma of her birth that printed itself into her very cells and altered her chemistry. Eventually the memory of my talk with Laura about our sensitive daughters moved in and with it an array of emotion flowed through me. With profound sadness I thought of how my daughter's whole life was directly affected by the Holocaust. A balmy July wind gently rustled the sheer curtains. The breeze seemed to carry my thoughts out of the Wartburg Hotel room and up through the star-dotted sky to settle in October 1952 in New York City.

As if watching myself on a movie screen I could see the glaring lights that gave my pale, strained face a greenish hue. My brain seemed numb. Physical strength was waning after the countless hours of my labor. "*My Puppele we will do it.*" I whispered stroking my swollen belly. I had spoken to the baby as if I knew that it was a girl. The maternity ward in the small New York hospital was old in 1952. The Manhattan brownstone had to be sprayed with antiseptic soaps and bug sprays to keep from contaminating its patients. Breathing was difficult. Gagging was easy

I felt alone and abandoned. My husband Emile had to abide by strictly enforced rules and not enter the labor room. "*We will be all right, little Madele,*" I cooed. Not to be overheard, I spoke to the baby in German. As if 3/4 of the hospital staff were not Jewish refugees from Hitler's





Germany! The word around New York at the time was that the refugees were reliable, hard working and cheap labor.

Dr. Klein, my obstetrician, was a survivor and did not arrive in the U.S. until after the war. He had been in one or more camps. He had already been a doctor in Vienna before he was imprisoned. In the new country, Klein, none the less, had to start from scratch. Once licensed most refugees did not end up in the best hospitals. I had known that. Yet loyalty and kinship had won out and I had chosen him as my doctor. His Jewish American born colleagues were for the most part not welcoming refugee doctors to the staff.

"I want a live baby!" Dr. Klein cried out. The fetal heart distress with each new contraction was getting more intense. "I want a live baby!" he repeated running his fingers nervously through his short, curly hair. Distress, anxiety and something I couldn't quite name was in his voice. It felt like guilt. An emotion I recognized even while writhing with contractions on the hospital bed for I, unlike many of my people, had not been in camp.

"We have to do a section now!" he screamed. Something from another time seemed to be taking him over. I did not know if I ever had seen such raw agony on anyone's face.

The chief of staff, Dr. Cohn, now commanded attention. He had an authoritative, unmistakably pure American accented voice, one that I had heard earlier that day, outside my room. He had refused the same request he was to dismiss now. He waved his hand as if pushing an object to the side and emphatically stated that he had seen women in labor for a week!" No, he was still not permitting a Caesarian section.

"Klein as always is an alarmist.



Guess he knows better than the chief,” he said sarcastically to no one in particular but to everyone within earshot. Klein took an audible breath and was about to snap back when the resident doctor, Steven Mack, tucked Klein at his sleeve. Mack was part of the white uniformed figures standing around me, the subject of concern. In a low voice not to be overheard by the departing Dr. Cohn, Steven Mack spoke to Klein.

“You won’t get anywhere with him this way. I guess you cried wolf once too often. Remember the woman he told you to induce when you wanted a section? He’s holding it over you that she was able to have a normal birth not too long after.”

“But this is different.” Klein thoughtfully added.

Mack nodded “Right. This is different. The baby’s in trouble. Possibly her too.”

A wave of pain threatened to rip my body apart. I had muffled my screams until then by biting my arm, but now let out a blood-curdling scream that brought the two doctors running to my side.

“Demerol!” I begged, remembering how good it felt that one time, the only relief in my 38-hour ordeal.

“Sedation makes the baby drowsy and could harm it. Hold on a little longer,” Dr. Klein pleaded.

Little did I know I had to hold on for yet another four hours. I tried to ignore Dr. Klein’s agitated pacing. Newsreels of American and allied soldiers entering Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz flashed in front of me. The pictures seemed to be crowding in to the labor room. What were they



doing here? I was an American with a new life and having a baby. He, prisoner Klein wringing his hands, pulling at his hair, was bringing the newsreel pictures in. "He has no children," my friend Gerda had said. "You know, there's talk that they fixed him in there."

Experiments! My hands moved away from my heaving pelvis and covered my eyes.

As if through a fog I heard Dr. Mack speak: "Klein, come here and check this out." My mind snapped to attention. The Resident pointed to the thick blackened blood on the white sheet. "My God, and her water has not even broken yet."

Klein once more applied the stethoscope to my belly and called out, "Baby's heart beat slower. I'll get Cohn for this!" He hissed through clenched teeth.

"Klein, Cohn is a bastard. Calm down. He doesn't like any of you refugees..."

The rest of what Mack said was drowned out by my loud moan. Dr. Klein bent over me for a moment and gently touched my hand.

I looked at the two doctors who had begun a hushed conversation. I felt fear squeeze my heart.

"She's closed up again. Only one finger wide. She'd been open to five. Damn it, what's going on?" Klein wailed.

"Seems that the contractions are slowing too." Mack reported in an equally low and stressed voice.





“I’m not waiting any longer!” Klein now yelled.

“Right,” Mack responded. “We declare her an emergency. Thank God he went home for the night and can’t stop us.

From then on all I remember was a flurry of activity around me and me sobbing:

“I’m so sorry that this is happening to you, my *Babele*.” My universe had shrunk to a blur of garish overhead bulbs and a long narrow corridor as I was wheeled toward the operating room. A swift transfer to the operating table and the anesthetist went to work.

There wasn’t that dark silence that I had heard about and longed for. That came later after the baby was safe. The spinal had to suffice until then. I entered a drifting limbo-like state. Things were happening to me, around me, but I was detached. Was there a baby’s cry? Had I been told that I had a daughter? Was that before or after I counted backwards and the pungent gas sank me into oblivion?

It was just a few hours after I had been slashed vertically from navel to pubic bone, the C. section method of the time, that Dr. Klein still in last night’s hospital garb came to see me.

“Like a banner,” he remarked as he drew his hand diagonally across his own ribs. “Each time you pushed harder, the baby was pulled back and choked.”

My attention wandered for a second and I thought, what a marvel! Such a tiny chest determined to live and breathe withstood being crushed for all those hours. I caught Dr. Klein’s next words: “Lodged in the position that the cord was, the baby would have strangled herself had she come through the birth canal.” He sighed and then went on.



“We were losing you. We rushed to prepare you for a blood transfusion. You’d lost a lot of blood and were still bleeding internally. Your uterus was over-stretched. It’s always more dangerous to do a section when labor has started. Especially when it’s this long. We didn’t even have to give you the transfusion because you rallied back. I’ve never seen anything like it. I can’t explain it medically. You are the toughest and bravest woman I ever met, even in the camps.” His voice trailed off as he turned away to wipe his tears.

As he was speaking I had a flashback to that moment that I had lain strapped on the surgery table on the verge of death. The baby had been born but a minute before. A strange sensation came over me. Later I was to hear people describe their near death experience very much like what I had gone through. I saw my mother as real as if she were alive. I reached out and started to go to her. I felt myself leave my body and move toward the light my mother had become. Then, something I could not identify but stronger than any force I had ever encountered seemed to halt me from coming closer and compelled me to turn back into life. I started to pray: “Please, dear God, if you must take me, take my baby too. Or have mercy and spare us both.” God had mercy. We both lived.

I asked myself, was this the moment Dr. Klein had just referred to? Was it at this point when the operating team had thought they had lost me that I had willed myself to live? Was this what he could not explain medically?

Guttural loud conversation and slamming car doors penetrated my reverie. I shook my head as if to clear it and sighed deeply before I became fully aware that I was on my pilgrimage in Stuttgart in my room at the Wartburg Hotel in the summer of 1998. It was quite late by now. I looked out the window to where a heated argument between a man and a woman was in progress. They



must have come home from an evening of drinking and now began to move across the street to an apartment building. I drank a glass of water and crawled into bed.

Just when I was crossing over into sleep a voice from the past, Dr. Klein's voice, resounded in my head: "They begged me, you know. They, the women in the camp begged me not to let their babies be born alive. Save them from what the Nazis will do to them in front of our eyes. You are a doctor. You must help us, fellow Jew, they pleaded."

I lay unmoving on the firm hotel mattress. My breath seemed to have halted waiting for more to come. Then it did. "I did so many times." The doctor's whispered confession sounded as clear as if he were standing next to me and not a memory preserved for 46 years.

I got out of bed and once more sat in the chair by the window. I sighed deeply and remembered Klein's sorrowful sigh and the way his body sagged after he had revealed the reason for the guilt that seemed to own him.

Almost a half century later deep in thought in my little German-clean hotel room I wondered whether the poor man's memories had tortured him with every moment of my daughter's long struggle to be born alive. Was the guilt that was buried within him reawakened with my baby's ordeal? Could his memory have distorted facts? Maybe he never did help the women abort since it seems unlikely that males and females were in the same barracks. Yet a woman might have gone into labor on the train and, indeed, he could have stopped the baby from taking its first breath. Might there have been an even darker secret, one that he could not face? Is it conceivable that doctor-inmates were forced to witness or even to partake in medical experiments?





Did he ask himself whether in his dark past as well as during my labor he could have handled things differently? Did he wonder whether there were repercussions from what happened at my baby's delivery? Possibly so, since he asked my family doctor, who was a friend of his, whether there were any problems with my child's development. How the circumstances of her birth must have haunted him as they did me. His questions to my doctor fired my growing fear. Jackie was 20 months at the time and still not walking.

At this point my concern was no longer with Klein. I did not blame or judge this tortured man. I had nothing but sorrow and compassion for him. My thoughts turned to my child and the long journey filled with anguish as well as joy that she, my husband and I traveled in the ensuing years.

But it was not the constant challenges that life presented for Jackie due to her fragile nervous system and resulting co-ordination difficulties that kept me hostage by the wakeful-night in the Hotel in Stuttgart. I was more concerned with the unseen dimension where linear concepts are useless. In that mystical realm, called thus because most people cannot navigate themselves in it and for the most part do not even know it exists, but which to me is more real than my corporal body. This body that has a relatively short span of existence in the scheme of time did not that night occupy my attention. Instead in my mind's eye I put myself once again back into that hospital room with Dr. Klein's agitation and cries for a live baby.

With it I watched the tentacles of evil and horror creep into the delivery room. Not that Victim Klein was evil but his unresolved guilt and raw memories left him open for the dark to stalk him in the form of Dr. Cohn's hostility and envy.



I thought of my own work as a movement therapist and my constant vigilance to stay objective. I had worked myself to exhaustion to keep my personal pain and experiences from coloring my clients' issues. When the huge vat of grief within me threatened to spill over despite my efforts, I stopped seeing clients and teaching classes while I underwent several years of emotional and spiritual cleansing. How much easier and more productive I was when I came back. I wished that Dr. Klein had done the same. But for him to have seen that as his moral responsibility he would have had to understand how his emanations affected those whom he touched and even those whom he did not directly touch. Yes, he would have had to understand that he did not suffer his horrors in isolation but that everyone is psychically connected and therefore effected knowingly or unknowingly by his tormented soul. Just as such mammoth events like the Holocaust made an indelible imprint not only in the memory of the survivors but in the very core of human consciousness--in the collective consciousness as Jung called it.

A scientist friend of mine once told me that when someone punctures a pressurized can such as spray paint container it not only damages the immediate environment but its rippling effect will eventually influence the ozone layer as far away as South America. Or like a vine whose roots spread under the soil randomly and rapidly. The plant just like evil attaches itself to whatever is in the way and unless cut down, eventually chokes the life out of even the largest, greenest tree.

I thought of how my life was shaped by what happened in that hospital. Had I not had to fight for my child's survival as I did in the years to come I would have spent my years on earth trapped in a prison of the Holocaust, bitterness and hatred. I was determined to exercise my free will and view my child's plight as a gift instead of a burden.

When Jackie was 40 years old she felt it was time to shed the weight with which she had shielded herself. Unfortunately the program that she was following let her go too far and despite



my repeated distress calls to her doctor she became much too thin. The physical reason for her emotional collapse was from protein starvation. However I knew that there was something much deeper going on. She looked as if she had come out of the camps. Thin, with a drawn face, her usually laughing intelligent eyes held a sadness and depth that took my breath away. Jackie came to live with me during the year that she was acute. She became obsessed with the Holocaust. Her moans in the middle of the night echoed her feelings. To me it was obvious that this memory which was not hers had lived in her hidden behind a wall of self-defense ever since the eventful hours she struggled to be born. She too had heard the screams of: "I want a live baby." Actually she herself said so. Will I ever forget my pain when I heard her say to a friend when she was ten years old that babies could hear while still in the womb Her friend disputed it and Jackie answered her: "Jane really, why else do you think I am dyslexic?"

I brushed away a tear that was trickling down my face. With it my inner soliloquy came to an end. A strange peacefulness spread through me. Somehow I sensed that my acceptance of what life had given me was complete. I knew that I had to make this trip to the city of my birth before I could let my personal Holocaust story come to rest. I thought of a drop of water falling in the ocean and it becoming one with the sea.





## Chapter 10

### Pilgrimage

With an effort I pulled my eyelids open. A quiver in the pit of my solar plexus stopped me from shutting them again and rolling over. The inner trembling told me the day was here. In an hour we were leaving for Dachau.

Several of us returnees had decided to visit the erstwhile concentration camp. We rented a small bus. It was Friday and on the following Monday we were to leave for home. We were going for the day and planned to be back by evening before *Shabbat* in time for those who wanted to go to synagogue.

Miriam went along. I was relieved. I knew the journey would be difficult even with the support of an understanding friend and alone it would be unendurable. We drove out of Stuttgart in the direction of Munich. Dachau, which to this day has not changed its infamous name, is a small town something like a suburb of Munich.

We passed the Mercedes Benz factory on the outskirts of Stuttgart, a huge but sleek structure. I had seen the Porsche Works a few days ago when we were on another day-trip. It is my understanding that they, like Mercedes-Benz had been in the weapons industry during the war. An elegant black horse rearing on its hind legs against a yellow background advertising the Porsche Dionisian wagon was on proud display. With pride the bus driver pointed to the Mercedes plant. "Such good cars, so strong," he said.

I thought of the slave labor that had rocketed these war machine companies into high productivity. In grotesque contrast gaunt faces with eyes that burned in sunken sockets flashed behind my



closed eyes. I struggled with my emotions. Except for Miriam the others on the bus did not seem to be aware of what I was feeling.

The traffic was snarled. Because of extensive roadwork we had to be rerouted. Why the whole world seems to choose the tourist-filled summer months for bettering their streets is a mystery to me. Only an hour of our four-hour trip had passed and we were way behind schedule. The talking and laughter around me was very taxing. I tried to shut it out. I suppose there are many ways to deal with the pain and anxiety of a visit to a concentration camp. Miriam and I were quiet and our faces reflected the somber task ahead. Others needed to dispel the gloomy anticipation with social interchange. There also was another kind of tension. Even on this holy mission the lack of unity that sometimes bordered on hostility between German and Eastern European Jews was apparent.

A prayer, like a mantra, pulsed rhythmically in me: Oh God please let your children learn to be tolerant of each other. Tears began to form in my eyes as I remembered Liese who had sat next to me in the Jewish school in Stuttgart.

We were eleven years old and had had an argument as schoolmates do. Her mother came to the school the next day and complained to the principal about those awful people. She then turned to me and said: "It is always your kind who don't fit in and don't belong to our country." Mother and daughter, the Germans whom Hitler reminded that they too were Jews no matter how assimilated, met the fate of their brethren in a concentration camp two years later.

My mind snapped back to the present when I heard a handsome gray haired lady suggest that she would like to stop and get some refreshments as her husband was diabetic. Actually he did not seem to be in need of food as they had brought some along. Since we had had a rest stop not too



long ago and we were already late most of us would have preferred to continue. Rita, a striking woman with shining black hair was quite nervous because she and her husband wanted to be back in time for synagogue. She spoke up and said so. This brought on the wrath of the non-observant couple. Remarks were made about the boorishness of the Israelis. Rita was from New York, however she had lived many years in Israel. With her Stuttgart born husband they moved back to New York several years ago.

I became sick to my stomach with the shock of it. Here we were on our way to Dachau and there was discord among people who had experienced the same grief. A grief that was being reawakened in each one of us as we neared the camp.

I read the road sign indicating that we had entered the town of Dachau. It looked like such an ordinary place. People shopping and doing other errands. As I looked out of the window surveying the surroundings I stared into the wrinkled face of a woman with gray hair tightly pulled back. Her eyes were ablaze. She raised her fist and shook her head at the many tourist buses of which we were but one. Was it that the many pilgrims reminded her of the evil past or was she angry because of the constant visitors who perpetuated the black mark on her town? In an effort not to judge I wondered if the bus cutting her off from crossing the street had upset the woman.

It was indeed a crowded bustling city around us. As such I was startled when the bus made a sudden left turn amid heavy traffic into the entrance of the camp.

One minute we were on the road which seemed to be the main artery through the town and the next we drove into the camp's driveway, which was filled with school buses and crowds of visitors. I had expected to be driven to some secluded place far away from the daily life of the inhabitants of Dachau. Instead the rows of barbed wire on top of a wall and above all the tall





watchtower, were visible to pedestrians or to passengers in cars and bicyclists as they traveled the road through town. The road that passed within arms-reach of the outer camp wall. This wall appeared to be made from wood and was not very high therefore it could hardly hide the ugly deeds that had gone on behind it. One wonders if all or several of the many houses around us had been there during the camp's evil activity from 1933 to 1945. Might they have housed staff and their families? Or was it the residential area for ordinary citizens? How could they bear to live in full view of the barbed wire that headed the wall?

In any case the overused excuse of the German public after the war that they did not know what was going on behind the barbed wire is ludicrous in the face of the camp's setting.

What about the screams? What about the stench? What about the gunshots? How could the townspeople not have known? The full impact of the treacherous denial did not fully hit me until I was in the museum later on. By that time I was alone. Miriam was at the other end of the one floor barrack like building. I stood in front of an enlargement of a letter from an official in charge of the freezing experiments in Dachau. It was written to his counterpart in Auschwitz. It spoke of the lowest temperatures that he had managed to reach in this climate by exposing the naked victims to hours of winter cold and still bring the victim back from the brink of death. The letter further stated something to the effect that it would be best to move all the freezing tests to Auschwitz as it was colder there and had better facilities to warm the victims and bring them back only to start the experiment again. As such large-scale experiments could be carried out. Then too the location of Auschwitz and the large size of the camp would be much more favorable. Less attention would be drawn to the procedures, "as the test-persons tend to scream when freezing."



So Dachau was a more exposed camp! My original suspicions were confirmed that the inhabitants of Dachau-Munich had to have known what was going on.

I managed to lean against the wall just as my knees buckled under me. With determination I moved in front of the glass case again. But what confronted me was too much. How could any human being look without flinching at the series of photographs of a man going through the horror of high altitude tests? The face above the striped uniform under its shaved head looked straight ahead. My eyes met his. There seemed to be a strange peace about him. Maybe his was a face of surrender. In anticipation of what he was too bear did his mind escape into that better world beyond? Not for long! The pain brought him back into his body. In the next picture he had his eyes pinched closed in agony. His hand cupped his ear. One by one the photos bore witness. The progression was terrifying to comprehend. I started to read a letter posted next to the pictorial evidence. It was from Nini Raucher thanking the *Reichsfuhrer* for taking an interest in her husband's experiments. He had conducted them over Easter, as Dr. Romberg (I expect that he was another staff doctor) would have been too sensitive and compassionate with the victims to do it. Actually the letter started with thanking the *Reichsfuhrer* for the wonderful treats of chocolates and such that he sent them as he so often had in the recent past. The children had the delicious gifts with their supper and her husband took some of the chocolate to the camp to nibble on. She continues thanking him for all the kindness and hopes that he can have a vacation so as to have a well-deserved rest from his strenuous work.

An agonizing pain in my ears seemed to cut through time and I was in that torture chamber. I knew I was about to lose consciousness. Once more I moved back and allowed the wall to hold me up. I took several deep breaths and would not allow myself the luxury of blacking out. People now were entering the room. I stepped out. In front of the museum I met up with Miriam. It was





then that I realized that I had lost my speech. It did not come back for the rest of our stay at Dachau.

We stood in the vast empty space that held the rows upon rows of barracks in its time. Several of the long lines of huts were still in existence. The symmetry of the layout of arid acres cried of cold, meticulous order.

Miriam said: "The emptiness with the markers where once the barracks stood is more horrifying than the actual buildings. It's so huge—so stark! It is a metaphor for the annihilation of dignity, of human compassion, of life itself." My tear filled eyes answered her in my silence.

While the facilities for gassing victims were in place, they actually were not used in Dachau. I do not know about the crematories. There certainly were enough bodies to be dealt with. This I can attest to. In the back of the last line of barracks where vibrant yellow and violet flowers were planted, there was a sign amid green shrubbery with the words *Pistol Range for Execution*. A shallow long but narrow ditch at the foot of the range served to absorb the blood of my massacred kin. Yes my kin, for everyone tormented in this hellhole was and always will be my family whether they were Jew, Gypsy, Catholic, or homosexual.

The slogan, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*," to work is freedom, was scrolled into an iron gate. I do not remember to what area the gate led. It might well be that my mind in self-preservation has forgotten. But I do remember it was not the entrance to the camp but led into some special rooms. I am not sure if the gate was renovated and had been placed at another spot other than where it once was. However its cruel irony had its effect on me and I am sure on the other pilgrims too.





In the excruciatingly slow movements of a Japanese *Buto*-dancer we once more crossed the large expanse. The barrack grounds whose earth had absorbed the sweat, tears, and blood of its human cargo seemed to go on forever. Our legs moving in almost imperceptible motion drew us toward our destination. The watchtower and the straight long park like lane defaced with the barbed wire borders that led to the exit seemed miles away.

My hand in rhythm with my labored walk reached into my pocket and drew out a small plastic bag with *Matza*. The last pieces of the *Shmura Matzoth* given to me as a blessing for my trip by my Sephardi spiritual teacher seemed the appropriate *Kaddish*. Slowly I crumbled the bread of affliction and in tempo with my movement covered the holy ground with the sacred crumbs.

It is the custom of some Sephardi Jews to save a piece of the *Afikoman*, that special and sanctified piece of *Matza* from the Passover *Seder* plate, and take it on trips as an amulet. After my return home I told my mentor what I had done with his gift. His sobs healed my wounded soul.

